

NEXUS MK

Shaping views, attitudes, policies, a country



Which views do the citizens of North Macedonia hold regarding various foreign relations and to what type of disinformation material they are most susceptible to?

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RESEARCH REPORT

Which views do the citizens of North Macedonia hold regarding various foreign relations and to what type of disinformation material they are most susceptible to?



Published by: PRESPA Institute - Skopje

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Foreign and Security Policy

Design: Brigada Design Ltd.

Skopje, August 2023



This report was prepared by Prespa Institute for the International Republican Institute (IRI) with financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy from the United States of America. The content is the sole responsibility of the author and does not in any way reflect the position of the International Republican Institute (IRI) or the National Endowment for Democracy.

Contents

I. Introduction.....	11
Research Goals	12
Research Design.....	12
II. Analysis	14
1. International Cooperation and Relations.....	16
Overall.....	16
Gender.....	16
Age	17
Education.....	18
Ethnicity.....	18
Political Party Preference	19
2. Relations with the neighbouring countries	20
Overall.....	20
Gender.....	21
Age	23
Ethnicity.....	24
Political Party Preference	25
3. EU Membership	26
Overall.....	26
Gender.....	27
Age	28
Ethnicity.....	29
Political Party Preference	30
4. Media Consumption	31
Overall.....	31
Gender.....	32
Age	32
Ethnicity.....	33
Political Party Preference	34
5. Voting preference	35
Overall.....	35
Gender.....	36
Age	36
Ethnicity.....	37

III. Inferential Statistics	38
IV. Experimental Analysis	44
V. Conclusion	45
VI. Annex	46
Section 1 – Overall: International Cooperation and Relations.....	46
Section 2: Gender – International Cooperation and Relations.....	49
Section 3: Age – International Cooperation and Relations	51
Section 4: Education – International Cooperation and Relations.....	53
Section 5: Ethnicity – International Cooperation and Relations.....	55
Section 6: Party Preference - International Cooperation and Relations	57
Section 7: Overall – Relations with neighboring countries.....	59
Section 8: Age – Relations with neighbouring countries.....	60
Section 9: Ethnicity – Relations with neighbouring countries.....	62
Section 10: Political Party Preference – Relations with neighbouring countries.....	64
Section 11: Overall – EU Membership	65
Section 12: Gender – EU Membership	66
Section 13: Age – EU Membership.....	68
Section 14: Ethnicity – EU Membership.....	70
Section 15: Political Party Preference – EU Membership.....	72
Section 16: Overall – Media Consumption	75
Section 17: Gender – Media Consumption.....	77
Section 18: Age – Media Consumption.....	79
Section 19: Ethnicity – Media Consumption.....	81
Section 20: Political Party Preference – Media Consumption	83

List of Figures

Figure 1: North Macedonia’s best friend, overall	16
Figure 2: North Macedonia’s best friend, by gender	17
Figure 3: North Macedonia’s best friend, by age groups.....	17
Figure 4: Which country or alliance is our country’s best friend, by education	18
Figure 5: North Macedonia’s best friend, by ethnicity.....	18
Figure 6: North Macedonia’s best friend, by political party preference	19
Figure 7: North Macedonia’s best friend neighbour.....	20
Figure 8: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of their signing	20
Figure 9: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria if they were to be signed today.....	21
Figure 10: North Macedonia’s best friend neighbour, by gender.....	21
Figure 11: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of signing, by gender	22
Figure 12: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria if they were to be signed today.....	22
Figure 13: Reasons for considering the two bilateral agreements as positive or negative.....	23
Figure 14: North Macedonia’s best friend neighbour, by age group.....	23
Figure 15: North Macedonia’s best friend neighbour, by ethnicity (BCRM).....	24
Figure 16: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of signing, by ethnicity.....	24
Figure 17: North Macedonia’s best friend neighbour, by Political Party Preference.....	25
Figure 18: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of signing, by Political Party Preference.....	25
Figure 21: Support for including three smaller ethnic communities in the constitution.....	27
Figure 22: Is EU membership our best option, by gender.....	27
Figure 23: Support for constitutional changes, by gender	28
Figure 24: Is EU membership our best option, or should we search for an alternative, by age group	28
Figure 25: EU membership or alternatives, by ethnicity.....	29
Figure 26: Support for including the various ethnic communities in the Constitution, by ethnicity.....	29
Figure 27: Is EU membership the best option, by Political Party Preference.....	30
Figure 28: Sources of information	31
Figure 29: Percentage of news that is truthful.....	31
Figure 30: Main source of news, by gender.....	32
Figure 31: Source of information, by age group.....	32
Figure 32: Percentage of news that is true, by age group.....	33
Figure 33: Source of informing, by ethnicity.....	33
Figure 34: Percentage of news that are fake, by ethnicity.....	34
Figure 35: Sources of information, by Political Party Preference.....	34
Figure 36: Voting preference, overall.....	35
Figure 37: Voting choices, by gender	36
Figure 38: Voting choices, by age group.....	36
Figure 39: Election preferences, by ethnicity.....	37

Table 40: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.....	39
Table 2: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.....	39
Table 3: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.....	40
Table 4: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.....	41
Figure 41: Is EU membership our best option?.....	42
Figure 42: How would you vote if an EU accession referendum is held this Sunday?.....	42
Figure 43: Support for constitutional amendments.....	43
Table 5: Means and statistical significance (denoted with *).....	44
Figure 50: The country or international alliance that contributed the most to the democratic development of North Macedonia, disaggregated by gender.....	49
Figure 51: The country or international alliance that contributed the most to North Macedonia’s economic development, disaggregated by gender.....	49
Figure 52: Which country or international alliance do we share the most values and interests with?.....	50
Figure 53: Most important shared values and interests, by gender.....	50
Figure 54: Most cooperation in the area of culture, by gender.....	50
Figure 55: The country or alliance that has contributed the most to the democratic development of North Macedonia, by age groups.....	51
Figure 56: Which country or alliance has contributed the most to our economic development, by age groups.....	51
Figure 57: Country with the most shared values and interests, by age group.....	52
Figure 58: Most important values and interests shared with the country we share most values and interests, disaggregated by age groups.....	52
Figure 59: Cultural cooperation, by age groups.....	52
Figure 60: Which country or alliance has contributed the most to our democratic development, by education.....	53
Figure 61: Which country or alliance has contributed the most for the economic development of our country, by education.....	53
Figure 62: Most shared values and interests with another country or alliance, by education.....	54
Figure 63: Which values or interests are shared, by education.....	54
Figure 64: The country (or alliance) that has contributed the most to North Macedonia’s democratic development, by ethnicity.....	55
Figure 65: The country (or alliance) that has contributed the most to North Macedonia’s economic development, by ethnicity.....	55
Figure 66: Shared values and interests, by ethnicity.....	56
Figure 67: Values and interests shared with the selected country, by ethnicity.....	56
Figure 68: Closest cooperation in the area of culture, by ethnicity.....	56
Figure 69: Greatest contribution in terms of democratic development, by political party preference.....	57
Figure 70: Greatest contribution in terms of economic development, by political party preference.....	57
Figure 71: Most shared values and interests, by political party preference.....	57
Figure 72: Most important shared values and interests.....	58
Figure 73: Greatest Cooperation in the Field of Culture, by Political Party Preference.....	58
Figure 74: Reasons for supporting (or not) the Prespa Agreement and the Agreement with Bulgaria.....	59
Figure 75: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria in the past, by age groups.....	60

Figure 76: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria now, by age groups.....	60
Figure 77: Reasons for assessing the two agreements as positive/negative, by age groups.....	61
Figure 78: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria in the past, by ethnicity.....	62
Figure 79: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria now, by ethnicity.....	62
Figure 80: Reasons for assessing the two agreements as positive/negative, by ethnicity.....	63
Figure 81: Support for the two bilateral agreements if they were being signed now, by Political Party Preference.....	64
Figure 82: Reasons for assessing the two bilateral agreements as positive/negative, by Political Party Preference.....	64
Figure 86: Reasons for why EU membership is the best option, by gender.....	66
Figure 87: Reasons why we should look for alternatives to EU membership, by gender.....	66
Figure 88: Support for an EU membership referendum, by gender.....	67
Figure 89: Reasons for why North Macedonia is not a member of the EU, by gender.....	67
Figure 90: Reasons why the EU is the best option, by age group.....	68
Figure 91: Reasons why the EU is the best option, by age group.....	68
Figure 92: If an EU membership referendum is held on Sunday, how would you vote, by age groups.....	69
Figure 93: Reasons for why North Macedonia is not a member of the EU.....	69
Figure 94: Support for the constitutional amendments, by age group.....	69
Figure 95: If the EU is our best choice, why is it so? By ethnicity.....	70
Figure 96: If we need an alternative to the EU, why is it so? By ethnicity.....	70
Figure 97: If a referendum was held, how would you vote? By ethnicity.....	71
Figure 98: Reasons for North Macedonia not being a member of the EU, by ethnicity.....	71
Figure 99: Reasons for why EU membership is our best option, by Political Party Preference.....	72
Figure 100: Reasons for why we need to look for an alternative to EU membership, by Political Party Preference.....	73
Figure 101: Support for an EU membership referendum, by Political Party Preference.....	73
Figure 102: Reasons for North Macedonia not being a part of the EU, by Political Party Preference.....	74
Figure 103: Source of information (domestic/international).....	75
Figure 104: Trust in domestic news outlets.....	75
Figure 105: Trust in foreign news outlets.....	76
Figure 106: Percentage of the news that is true, by gender.....	77
Figure 107: Source of information (domestic/international).....	77
Figure 108: Trustworthiness of domestic news outlets, by gender.....	78
Figure 109: Trustworthiness of foreign news outlets, by gender.....	78
Figure 110: Source of information, by age groups.....	79
Figure 111: Consumption from domestic media, by age group.....	79
Figure 112: Consumption from foreign media, by age groups.....	80
Figure 113: Source of information, by ethnicity.....	81
Figure 114: Trust in domestic media, by ethnicity.....	81
Figure 115: Trust in regional and international media, by ethnicity.....	82
Figure 116: Percentage of news that are truthful, by Political Party Preference.....	83
Figure 117: Source of information (domestic/foreign), by Political Party Preference.....	83
Figure 118: Domestic sources of information, by Political Party Preference.....	84
Figure 119: Domestic sources of information, by Political Party Preference.....	85
Figure 120: International sources of information, by Political Party Preference.....	86
Figure 121: International sources of information, by Political Party Preference.....	87



I. Introduction

- 45.3% of our participants identify Serbia as North Macedonia's greatest friend and ally.
- 61% of our participants would vote in favour, with 31% voting against at an EU accession referendum, if held on Sunday
- Women are twice as likely to identify Kosovo as a friend, five times more likely to identify Russia as a friend and twice as likely to say they do not know which one is a friend, compared to saying that no one is a friend.
- Older people have 6% lower chance of identifying Greece as a friend, as compared to saying that no one is a friend.
- Albanians are 75 times more likely to say Albania is a friend and 142 times more likely to say that Kosovo is a friend, as compared to saying that no one is a friend.
- Austria, Slovenia, Canada, China, Japan, and Russia are friendlier according to ethnic Macedonians, while Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Switzerland, the US, and NATO are friendlier according to Albanians.
- Higher education leads to higher likelihood of supporting EU membership, an EU accession referendum in the near future, and including smaller ethnic groups in the Constitution as a pre-condition for EU membership.
- Women are less likely to support inclusion of smaller ethnic groups in the Constitution than men.
- Older people are less likely to support EU accession and inclusion of the smaller ethnic groups in the Constitution.
- 48% of people would click on a positive news article about Russia.
- 52% of people would click on a positive news article about the EU.
- 50% of people would click on a negative news article about the EU.
- 56% of people would click a news article about Covid-19 vaccines.
- 44% of people would believe a negative news article about the EU, regardless of whether they would click on it or not.

Research Goals

The aim of this research is to answer two main questions: Which views do the citizens of North Macedonia hold regarding various foreign relations and to what type of disinformation material they are most susceptible to.

We regarded the interplay of these two factors as crucial for constructing our research design. While views of other countries are important indicators of North Macedonia’s future foreign policy positions, when analysed together with weaknesses in disinformation dissemination, we are able to pinpoint the areas in which North Macedonia’s population is most vulnerable. The countries that enjoy a higher rating overall will likely have a greater success in spreading disinformation. This idea comes from the fact that the positive view of a country usually comes with greater media consumption and cultural exchange. As our findings show below, shared values and interests are very important for our citizens.

Research Design

The quantitative data collection consisted of two parts: a survey and a list experiment. Both quantitative methods tackled different, but complementary aspects of the research goals, giving us a more holistic picture of the main research question.

The survey consisted of a nationally representative sample of adults aged 18+, with a boosted nationally representative sample of respondents aged 18–35 years. Altogether, the survey collected 1546 responses using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method. The survey responses were recorded in the period from April 13th to May 4th 2023.

The respondents answered 18 questions regarding their foreign policy views, as well as six questions on disinformation and media consumption patterns. The demographic portion of the survey included questions on gender, age, education, ethnicity, employment status, urban v. rural dwelling, region, and political party support.

The list experiment tested for two different aspects of disinformation: likelihood to engage with a news article, and veracity of news articles, both based on their titles only. Within each of these two aspects there was a treatment and control condition. As portrayed with the table below, the entire sample was divided in four groups: clickability control group, clickability treatment group, veracity control group and veracity treatment group.

	CLICKABILITY	VERACITY
	On how many of these titles would you click to read more?	How many of these titles do you think are true?
Control group		
Treatment group		

For the participants in the two control conditions, a set of four random titles were given for each question and they were asked to assess on how many of those titles they would click to read more and for how many of those titles they believed to be true. The participants in the treatment condition received five titles which included the same four from the control condition, and an additional fifth title that was the research focus of the question. A mock example of a question is presented below.

Control group	Treatment group
How many of these titles...	How many of these titles...
1. "New tariffs for..."	1. "New tariffs for..."
2. "Tanzania introduces a..."	2. "Tanzania introduces a..."
3. "A violinist from North Macedonia..."	3. "A violinist from North Macedonia..."
4. "Child obesity reaches..."	4. "Child obesity reaches..."
	5. "Russia promises peace in the world"

There was a total of 16 questions, each testing for various topics that could be the focus of disinformation campaigns. These included a positive and a negative title about the Government, Serbia, Turkey, Russia, China, NATO, the EU, as well as a single title for vaccines and Covid-19. The term "positive" and "negative" could be (and probably were) understood rather subjectively by participants. However, they were chosen for their alignment with North Macedonia's foreign policy positions.

The difference in means between the treatment and control groups for each question gives us the clickability or veracity of each topic. Each result was tested with a t-test for statistical significance. The treatment and control groups were compared for age, gender, employment status, ethnicity, urban v. rural dwelling, education, and region in which they lived. No statistically significant difference was found between these two groups, which leads us to believe that the results are credible.

II. Analysis

Our analysis consists of three interrelated approaches: we considered and present the *descriptive statistics*, followed by *inferential statistics* and finally, we looked at the results of the *experiment*.

For the purposes of further analysis, the Borda Count Ranking Method was applied to questions that required ranking. The method is based on the algorithm of ranking and awarding points.

For example, when ranking North Macedonia's neighbours, all 5 neighbouring countries are ranked with the first mentioned (biggest friend) getting 5 points. The second mentioned gets 4 points. The third ranked gets 3 points. The fourth place gets 2 points, while the fifth place or the last gets 1 point. Some respondents ranked all 5 neighbours, some only 4 or did not know how to sort them, etc.

Additionally, new variables were opened where the number of points is recorded in terms of whether they were first mentioned or second mentioned, etc. This method is in the class of so-called "Fair Voting Score". Everyone gets points depending on where they are ranked. The one who has the most points "wins". Therefore, the results are actual sums of points received by each of the given options. When a percentage point is given, it is a percentage point of the maximum possible score, not the percentage point of respondents or citizens. In other words, it is a percentage of points won.

The Borda Count Ranking Method was applied to all sets of questions where ranking was required. Tables or graphs containing the Borda Count Ranking Method are indicated clearly in the caption with BCRM.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics is organized in X topics, with several questions per topic. We present below the findings visually, for the following demographic categories: *overall, by gender, by age group, level of education, ethnicity, and political party preference*. To facilitate easier access to the most relevant data, we have selected a few figures from each topic to present in the main body of the report. The rest of the findings can be found in the Annex.

The questions are presented below:

<p>International cooperation and relations</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generally speaking, which country, international organisation or Union is North Macedonia's best friend? 2. Which country or alliance has contributed/donated the most to the democratic development of North Macedonia? 3. Which country or alliance has contributed/donated the most to the economic development of North Macedonia? 4. With which country or alliance does North Macedonia share the most common values and interests? 5. Which are those common values and interests? 6. With which country or alliance does North Macedonia cooperate with the most in the field of culture?
<p>Relations with the neighbouring countries</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Which neighbouring country is North Macedonia's best friend? 8. At the time when they were signed, were you supportive of the Prespa Agreement and the Agreement with Bulgaria? 9. If those same agreements were to be signed again in the next period, would you support them? 10. Why do you assess them as positive/negative?
<p>EU Membership</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Do you consider EU membership to be the best option for the country, or should we look for an alternative? 12. Why do you consider EU membership to be the best option? 13. Why should we search for an alternative to EU membership? 14. If an EU membership referendum is held on Sunday, how would you vote? 15. Why is North Macedonia not a member of the EU? 16. To continue the accession negotiations, North Macedonia needs to add the Bulgarian, Croatian and Montenegrin ethnic communities in the Constitution. Do you agree with these proposals?
<p>Media and disinformation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Which source of information do you use most often to be informed about geopolitical questions, international relations, as well as important political questions that concern North Macedonia? 18. Lately, many have talked about fake news and disinformation. According to you, what percentage of the news is true? 19. For geopolitical issues, international relations, as well as important political questions that concern North Macedonia, do you more often get your information from domestic or foreign news outlets? 20. Which domestic news outlet do you trust the most? 21. Which foreign news outlet(s) do you trust the most?

1. International Cooperation and Relations

Overall

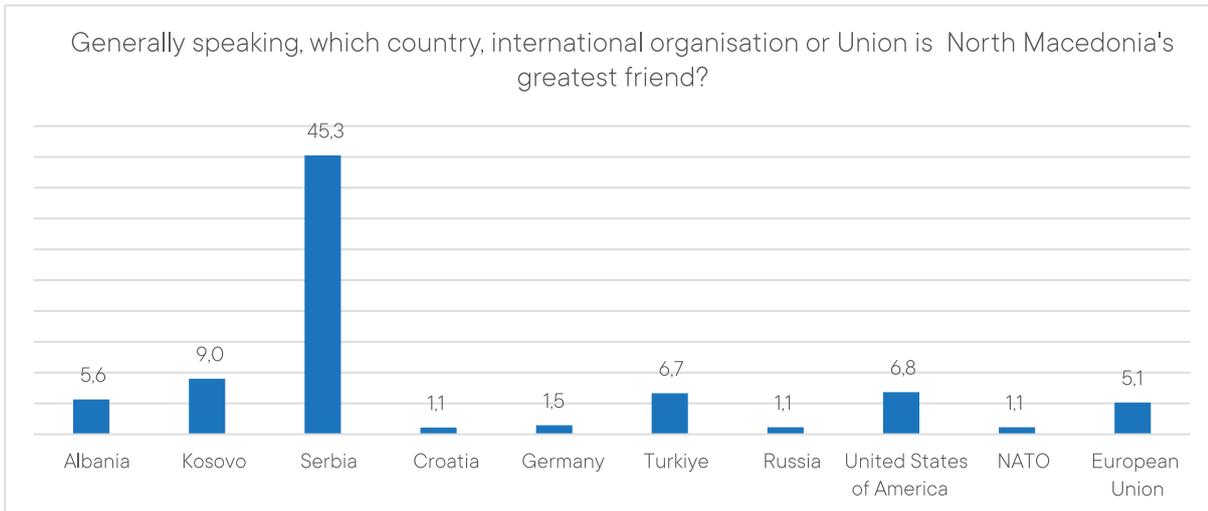


Figure 1: North Macedonia's best friend, overall

Overall, Serbia remains regarded as one of North Macedonia's best friends, as seen in Figure 1. When asked which country or international alliance has been most helpful for North Macedonia's democratic development, Serbia appears in third place, after the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). In terms of economic development, the EU is seen as the greatest contributor, followed by the US and in third place, Serbia. Finally, when it comes to common values and interests, Serbia is seen as the most important country for North Macedonia with 62.8%, followed by Albania with 14.9%. Following up on this question, we asked the participants which values do they believe we share with the country they selected. Religion, tradition, and history were the top choices. A similar picture is painted when we asked which country do we cooperate the most in the field of culture.

A disturbing number of respondents said that no country is North Macedonia's best friend (10.3%), has helped North Macedonia's democratic (13.9%) and economic development (9.7%). That value drops to 3.1% when asked which country shares values and interests with North Macedonia.

For more insight into this aspect of the research, please see the figures under section 1 of the Annex to the Report.

Gender

When disaggregated by gender, we see only slight differences. 48.8% of women, as opposed to 41.6% of men see Serbia as the country's best friend. The trend is slightly reversed when it comes to the US: 9.2% of men versus 4.6% of women, as shown in Figure 2.

The differences are starker when asked about the democratic contribution: Women see Austria, Serbia, Belgium, Albania and Bulgaria as having contributed the most, while men identify the US, the EU, none and Serbia as the greatest contributors. In economic terms, the difference between the gendered perspectives is less pronounced: Men slightly favour the EU and the US, while women are more likely to choose Turkey or state "they don't know". In terms of shared values and interests, women have a slightly greater preference for Serbia, while men show the same preference for Albania. The difference in which values are important differs only slightly: Women put a slightly greater emphasis on tradition, history and religion.

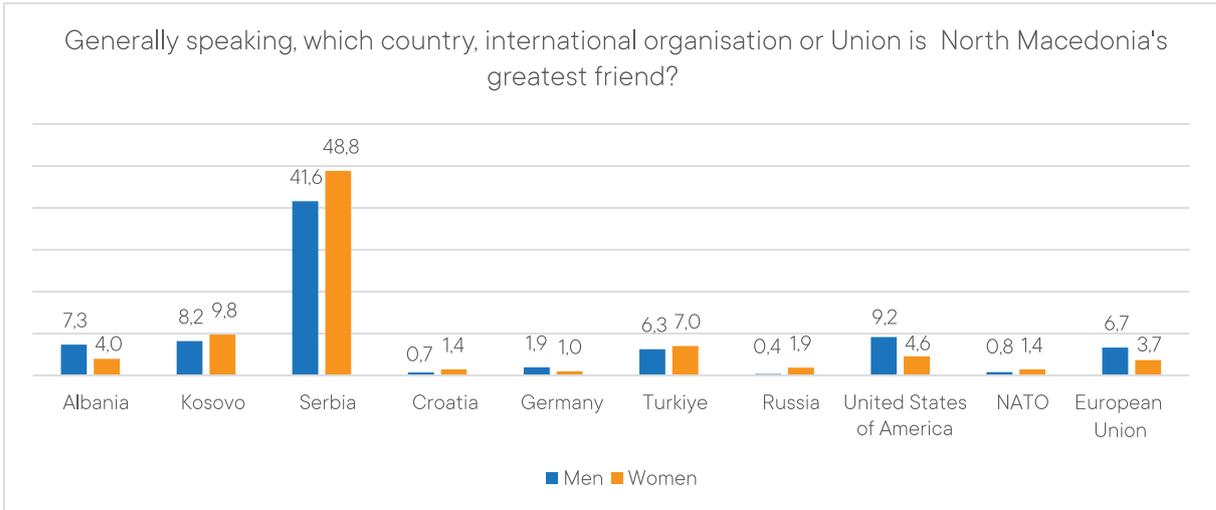


Figure 2: North Macedonia's best friend, by gender

For further insight into this aspect of the research, or to see the graphs for the data pointed out in the paragraphs above, please see the figures under section 2 of the Annex to the Report.

Age

Serbia is definitely most popular with the older generations, but the difference with the younger generations is not that stark (Figure 3). The respondents aged 35–54 recognize the democratic contributions of the US and the EU most notably (28.3% and 24.1% respectively), while the younger and older respondents see Serbia as significantly more important for our democratic development. When it comes to contributions to our economic development, the youth is split between seeing Serbia and the EU as most important (16.5% and 25.6% respectively).

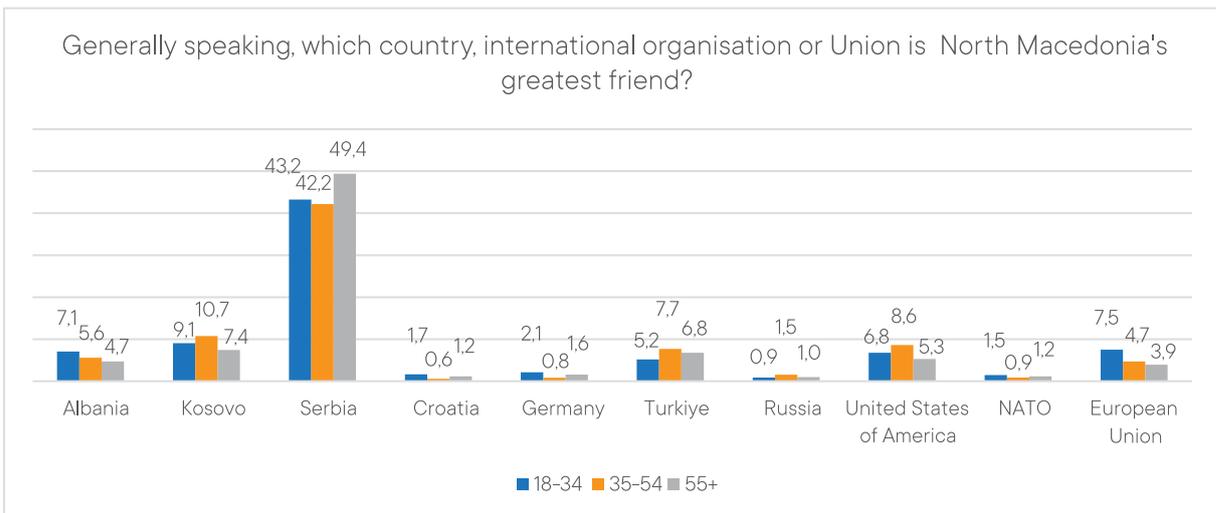


Figure 3: North Macedonia's best friend, by age groups

Further insight into this aspect of the research and more data is available under section 3 of the Annex to the Report.

Education

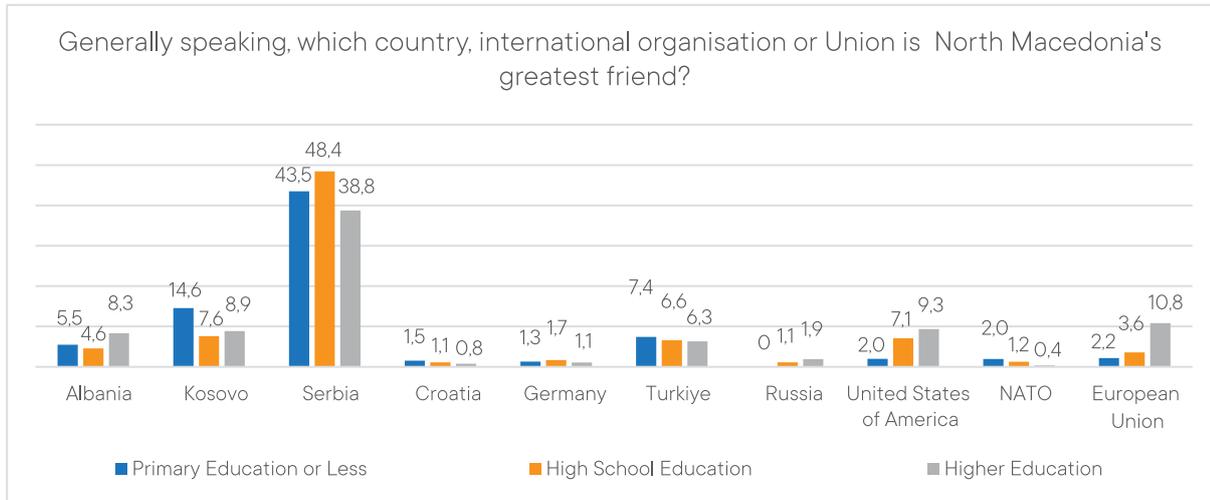


Figure 4: Which country or alliance is our country's best friend, by education

When analysed by level of education, the most interesting observation is the fact that highly educated people see the US and the EU as most important for our democratic development (Figure 19), however, they still do not see them as our best friends. A similar pattern is noticed when asked about economic development, where it is notable that a large percentage of those with primary education or less (23.6%) see Serbia as the most important contributor. Tradition seems to be the most important value for those with primary education or less.

More data and graphs on this aspect of the research is given under section 4 of the Annex to the Report.

Ethnicity

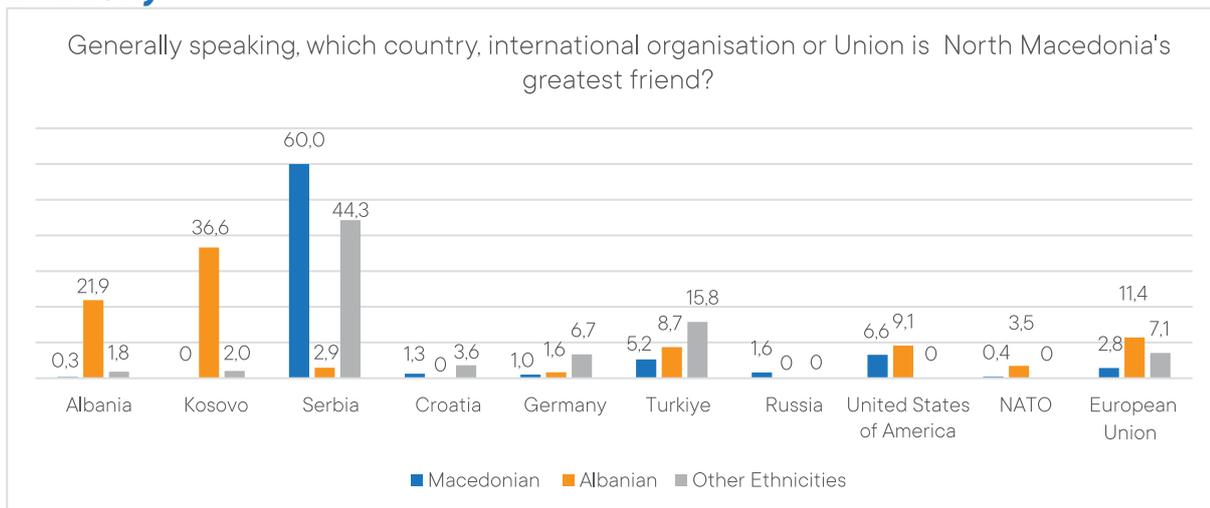


Figure 5: North Macedonia's best friend, by ethnicity

The differences in opinion are most stark when we look at the data along ethnic lines. For the majority of respondents who identify as Macedonian, Serbia is our best friend, while it is Kosovo, and then Albania for most Albanians. For many of the other ethnicities, Turkey is identified as a best friend. Albanians overall have a much higher opinion of the involvement of the US and the EU in our democratic development, as well as economic

contributions. Interestingly, in terms of the economy, the participants from the other smaller ethnic groups recognize Serbia, Germany, and Turkey as highly important.

For further insight into this particular aspect of the research, please see section 5 of the Annex to the Report.

Political Party Preference

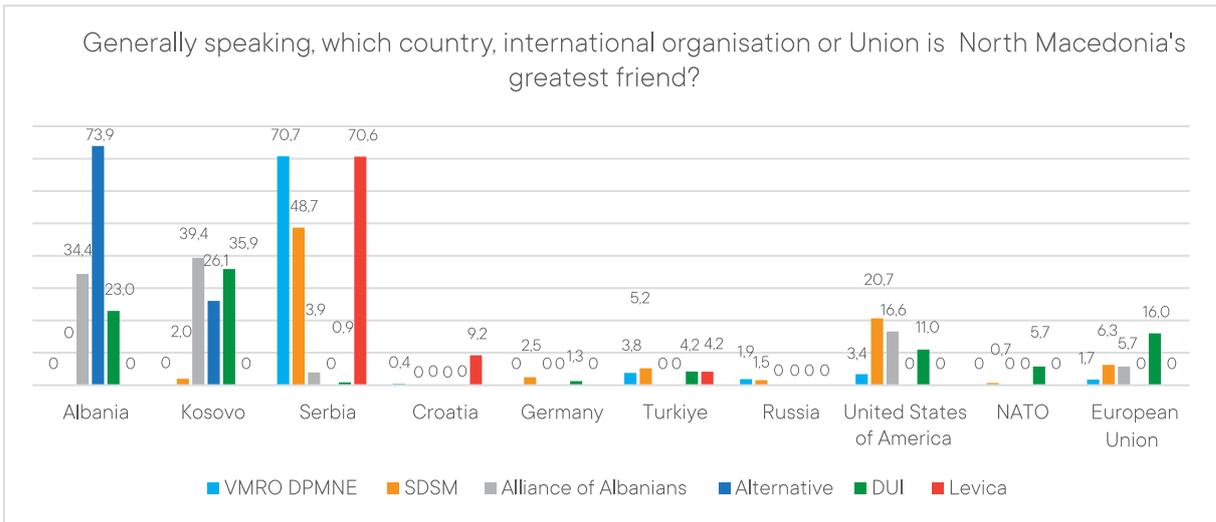


Figure 6: North Macedonia's best friend, by political party preference

The Political Party Preference paints an important and logical picture, as long as we ignore the ideological declarations of the parties. Thus, VMRO DPMNE, Levica and a smaller portion of SDSM supporters who took part in this survey agree that Serbia is our best friend (Figure 6), while most of the Albanian political party supporters, as well as SDSM supporters recognize the US and the EU as most important for our democratic development. When it comes to shared values, Albania and Serbia are the most popular choice among the main political party supporters.

Further data and graphs on this aspect of the research is available under section 6 of the Annex to the Report.

2. Relations with the neighbouring countries

Overall

In overall numbers, Serbia is a leader as the best friend from our neighbours, while Bulgaria ranks the lowest (Figure 7). There is significantly less support for the Agreement with Bulgaria, either in the past or currently. Participants recognize the benefits from resolving bilateral issues with our neighbours, but they also recognize a dose of injustice.

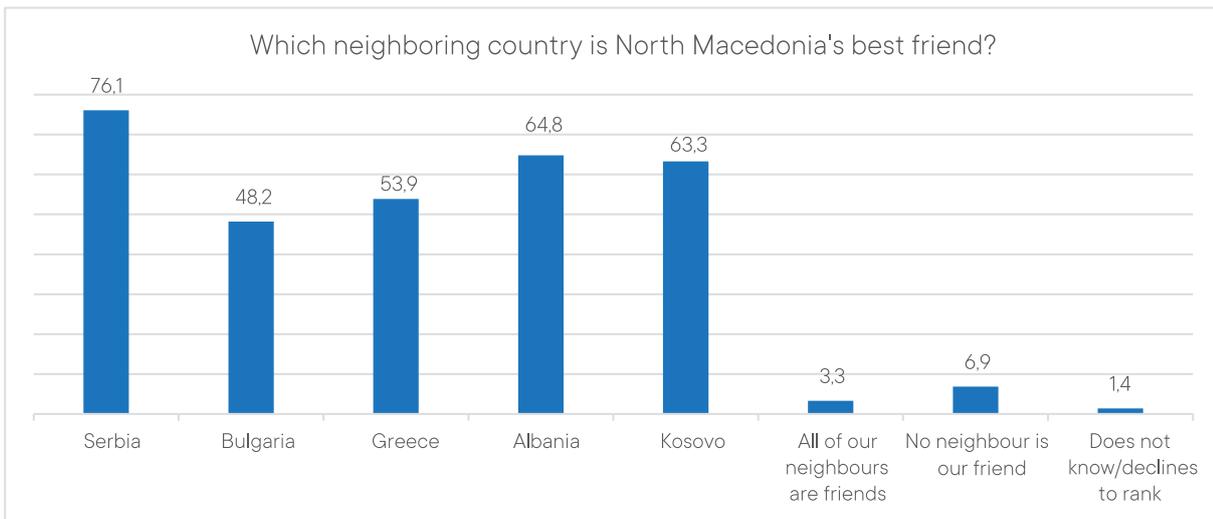


Figure 7: North Macedonia's best friend neighbour, overall

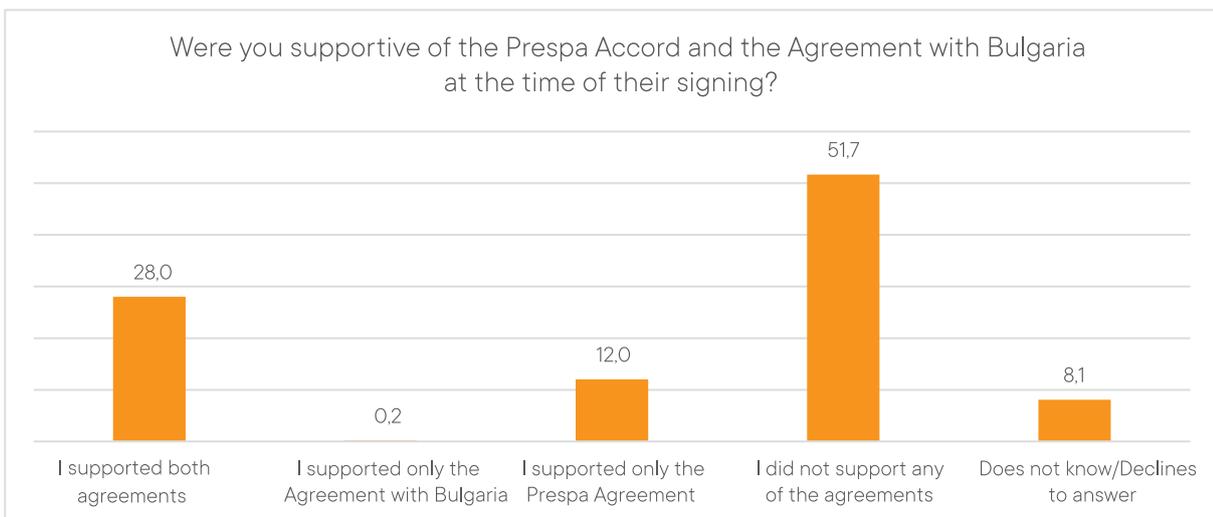


Figure 8: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of their signing

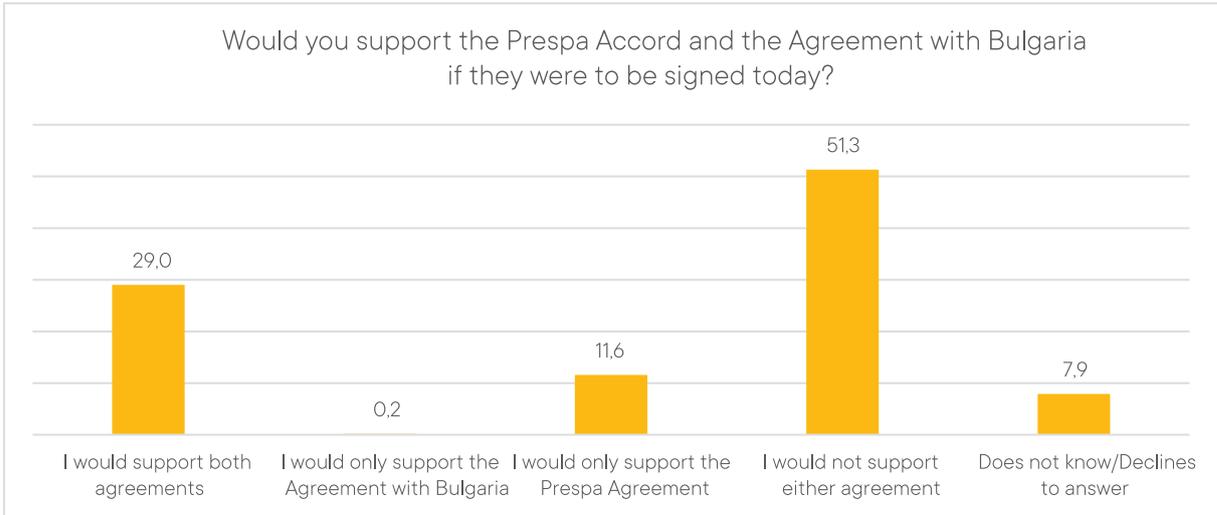


Figure 9: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria if they were to be signed today

More on this part of our survey could be found in Section 7 of the Annex.

Gender

Gender does not seem to play a big role in differentiating the views on neighbouring relations, except for a slight trend for women to be less accepting of the bilateral agreements with Greece and Bulgaria, as well as less likely to see the benefits as such.

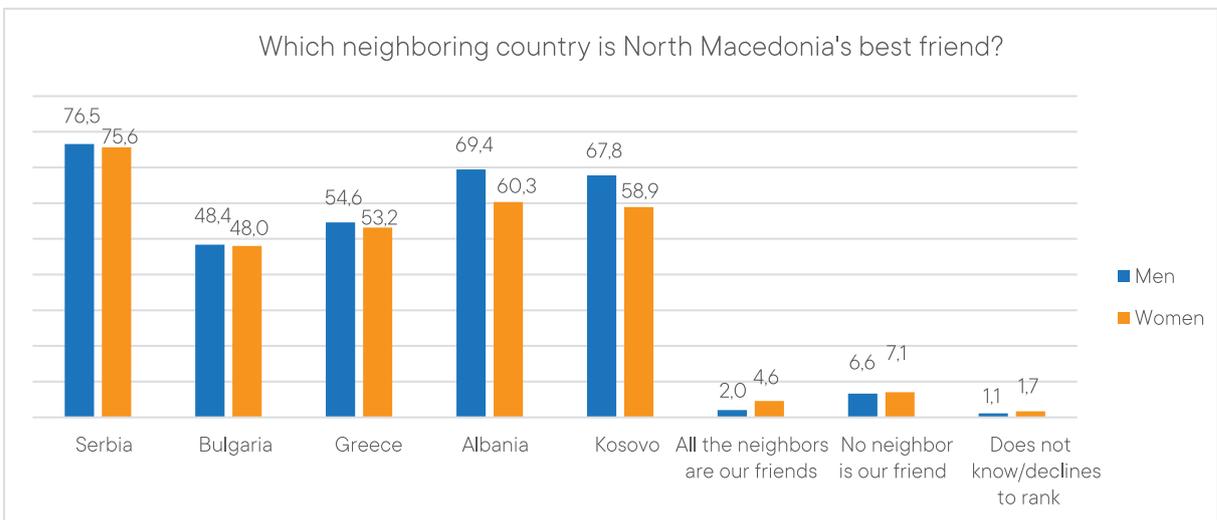


Figure 10: North Macedonia's best friend neighbour, by gender

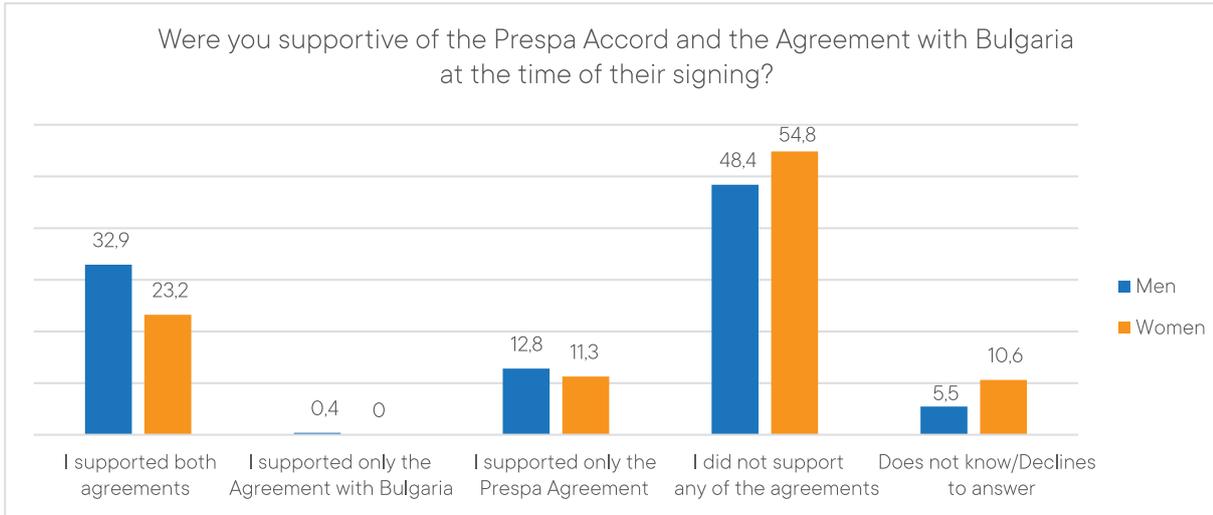


Figure 11: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of signing, by gender

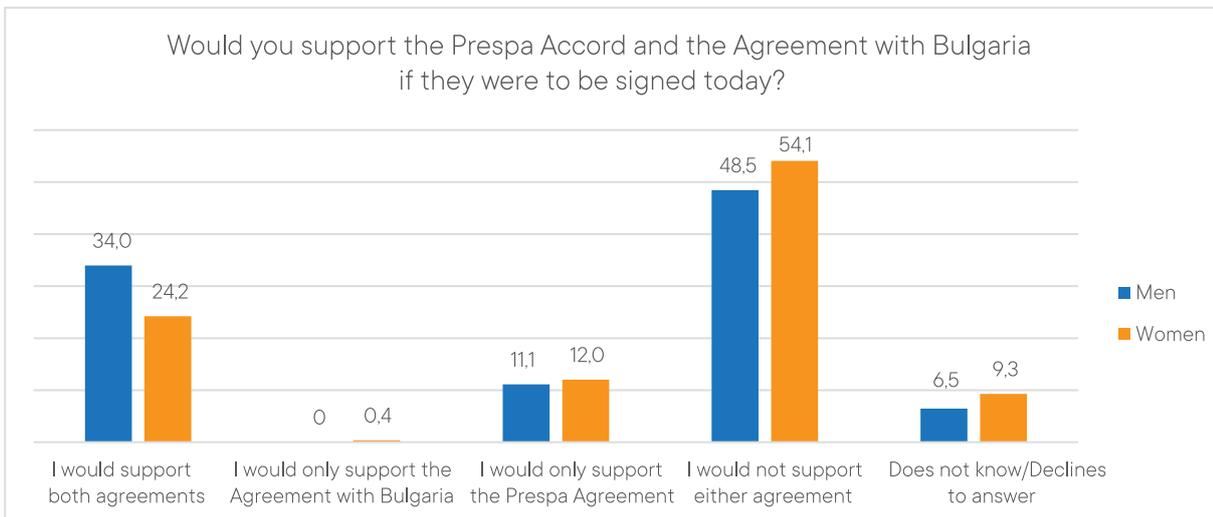


Figure 12: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria if they were to be signed today

Figure 13 below is particularly interesting. It seems that our male participants focus more on some of the positive consequences of these bilateral agreements, such as the start of EU accession negotiations. On the other hand, the women participating in the survey focus more on the potential threats to the identity or are more pessimistic about the start of negotiations. Further research into this would be required to understand the reasons behind this disparity.

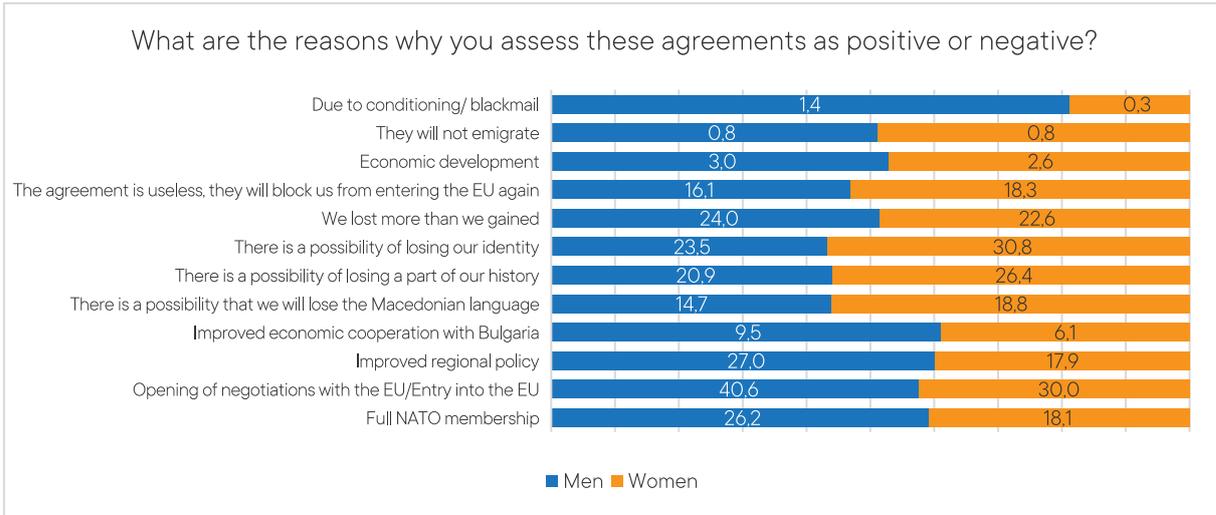


Figure 13: Reasons for considering the two bilateral agreements as positive or negative

Age

From our participants' pool, it seems that younger people tend to be a little more accepting of the two bilateral agreements, as well as more likely to recognize EU membership as a benefit.

More information on this part of our research could be found in section 8 of the Annex.

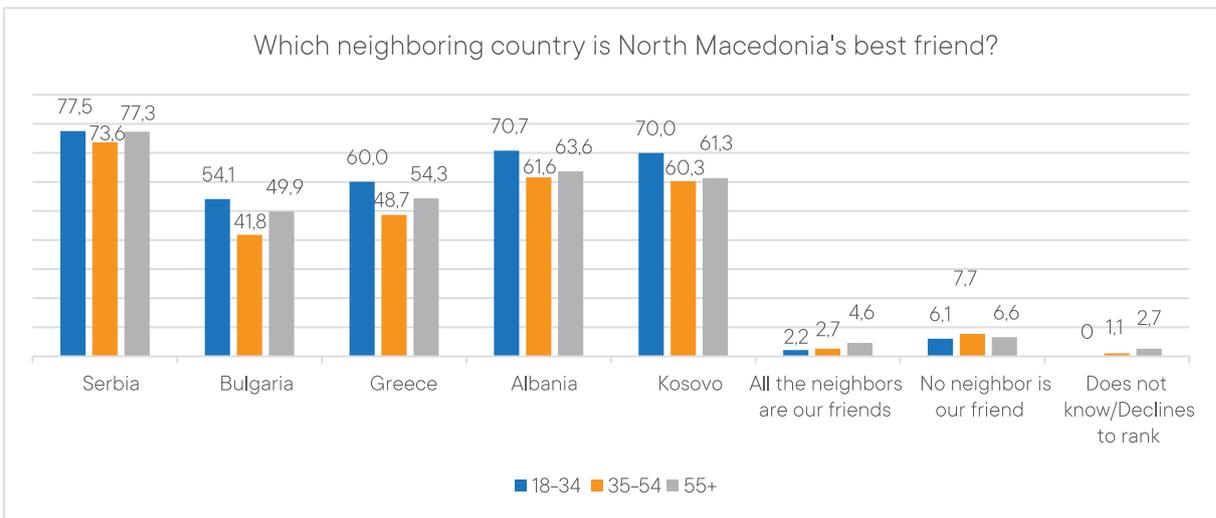


Figure 14: North Macedonia's best friend neighbour, by age group

Ethnicity

Again, ethnicity plays a huge role in how foreign policy is perceived, within our immediate neighbourhood included. Serbia is the best friend according to our Macedonian participants, while Albania and Kosovo vie for the first place among Albanians. Bulgaria has the lowest rating among all ethnic groups, while Albanians are significantly more in favour of the two bilateral agreements.

More figures and graphs on this aspect can be found in Section 9 of the Annex.

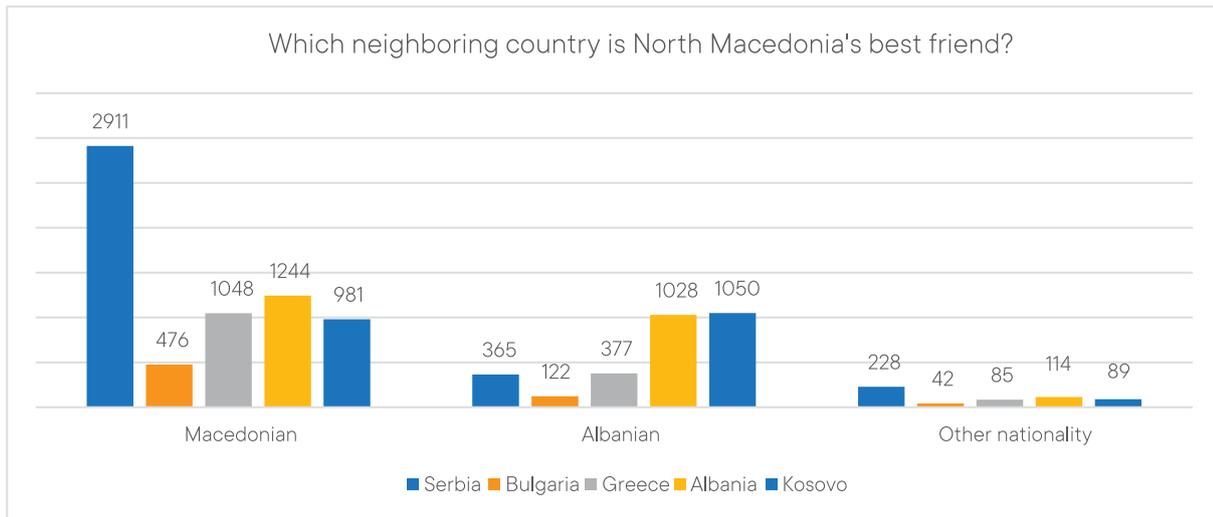


Figure 15: North Macedonia's best friend neighbour, by ethnicity (BCRM)

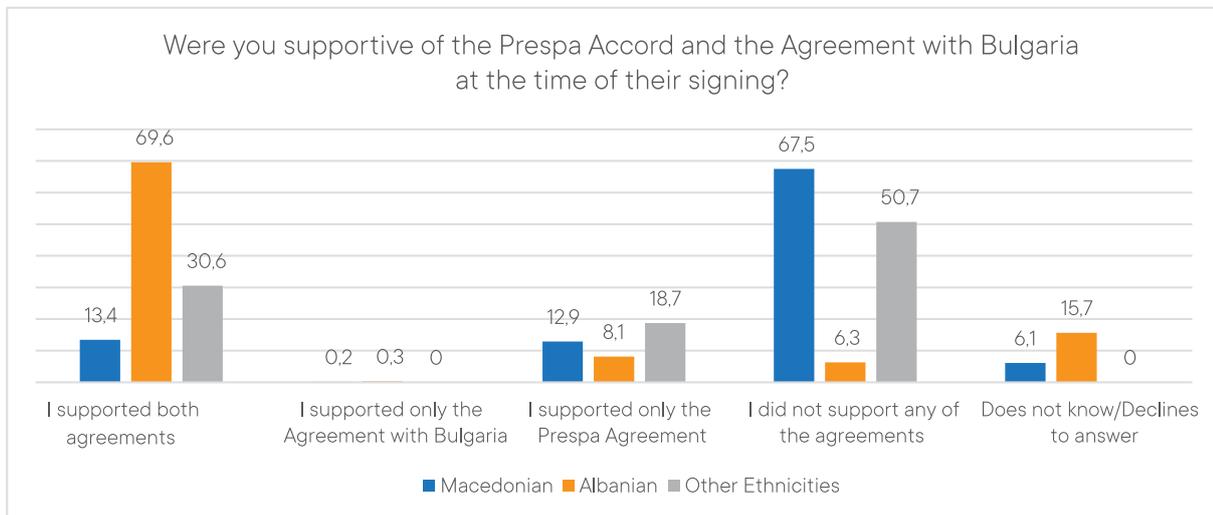


Figure 16: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of signing, by ethnicity

Political Party Preference

Supporters of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM see Serbia as our best friend, while the predominantly Albanian parties look at Albania and Kosovo as our best friend, as seen in Figure 17. Supporters of VMRO-DPMNE and Levica were not and are not supporters of the two bilateral agreements with Greece and Bulgaria, and a number of SDSM supporters changed their mind about supporting the agreement with Bulgaria. Our data supports the idea that, when it comes to neighbourly relations, the supporters of VMRO-DPMNE and Levica are rather similar.

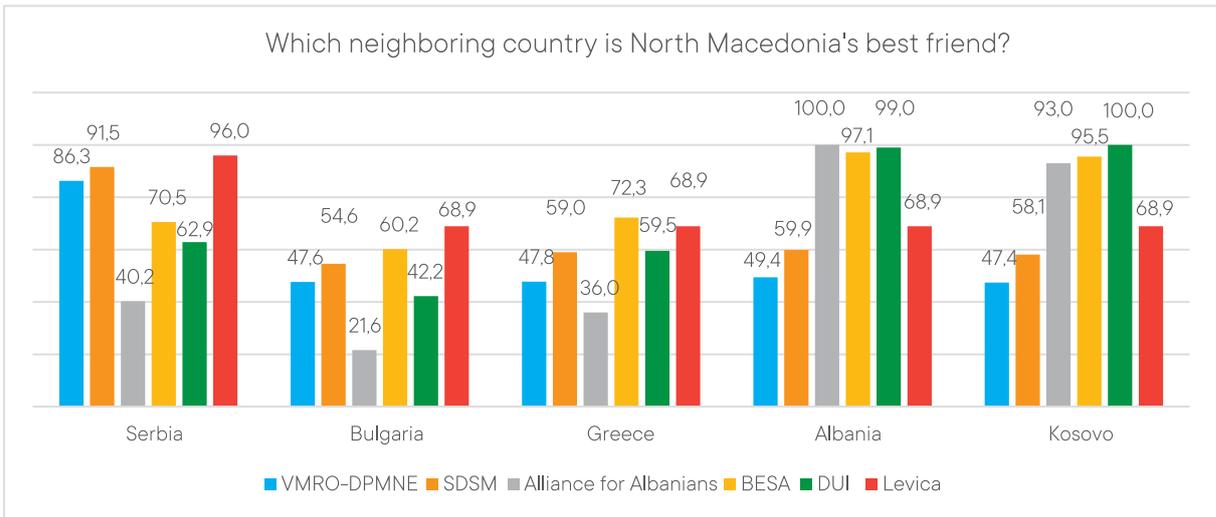


Figure 17: North Macedonia's best friend neighbour, by Political Party Preference

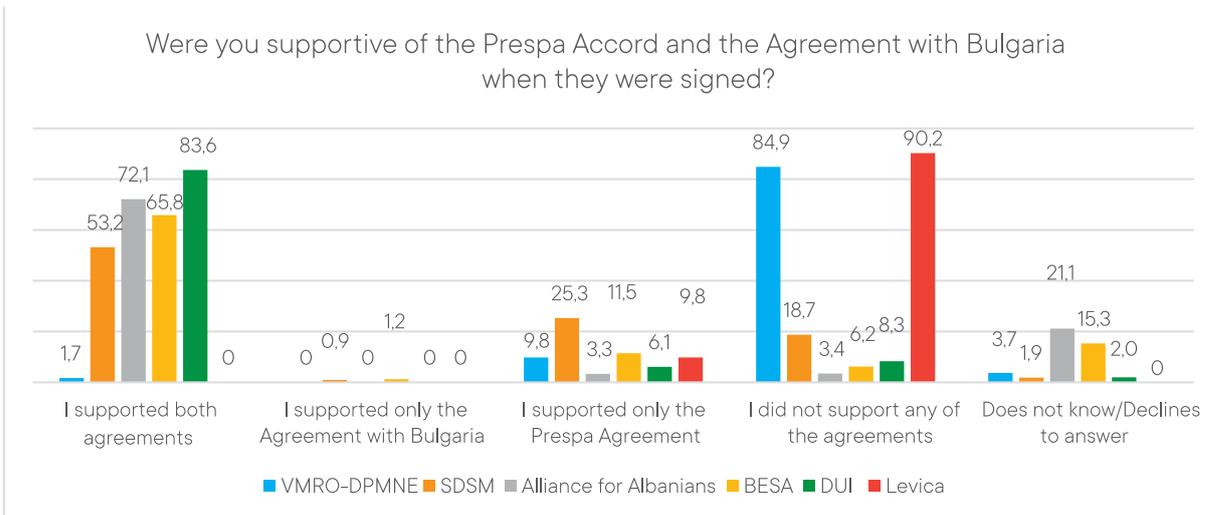


Figure 18: Support for the Prespa Accord and the Agreement with Bulgaria at the time of signing, by Political Party Preference

For more information on this topic, please refer to section 10 of the Annex.

3. EU Membership

Overall

North Macedonia is currently living through one of the worst EU approval ratings, since EU approval ratings started being measured in the country, with only 61.2% of our respondents saying that EU membership is our best option. If a referendum was held, only 61% would vote in favour. While these may be high numbers compared to some EU member states, they are the lowest numbers we have had so far. Most of our respondents blame our neighbours for blocking our accession. Seen that constitutional amendments are the way forward to EU Accession, a large portion of 45.4% of respondents are against any constitutional amendments, while 12.9% are against including the Bulgarian minority. On the other hand, no such opposition exists for including the Croatian minority in the Constitution.

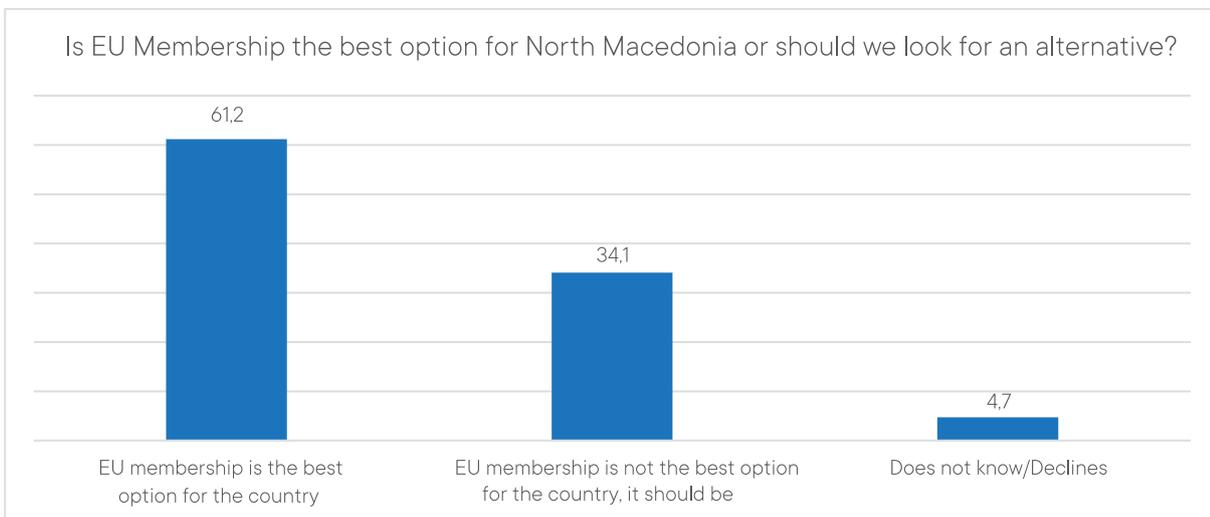


Figure 19: Support for EU membership

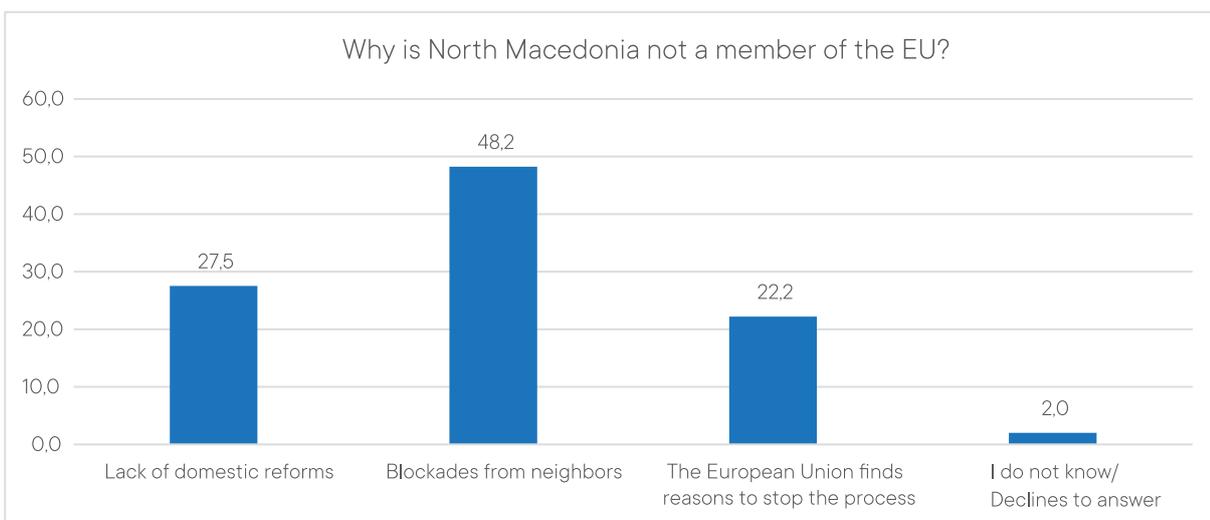


Figure 20: Reasons why North Macedonia is not a member of the EU

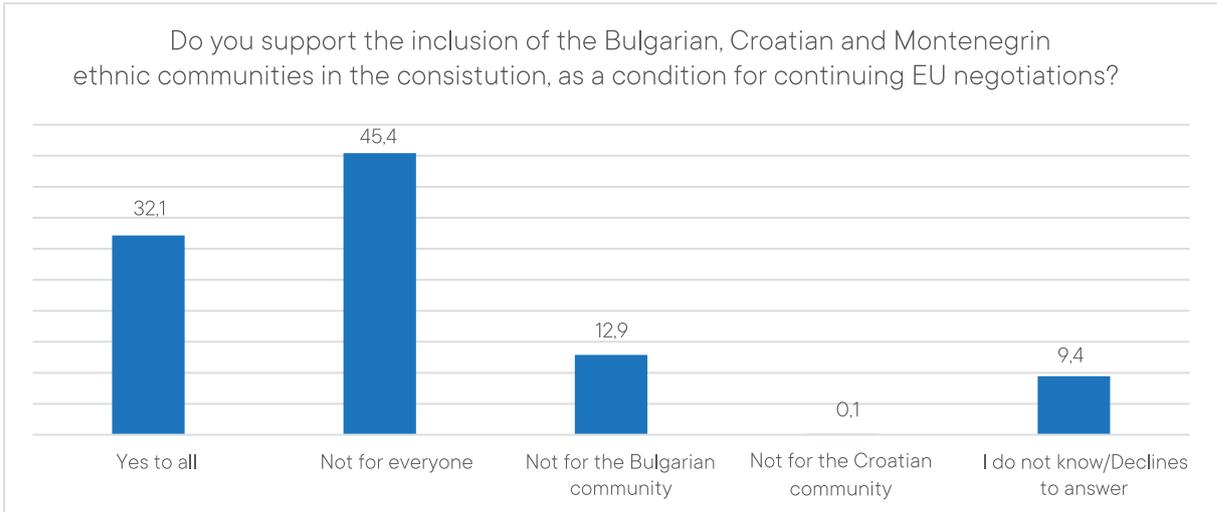


Figure 21: Support for including three smaller ethnic communities in the constitution

Further information on these questions can be found in Section 11 of the Annex.

Gender

Women tend to be slightly more sceptical of the EU than men, but the differences do not go beyond several percentage points. Based on our data, women also seem to be less inclined to support a constitutional change to include the smaller ethnic groups.

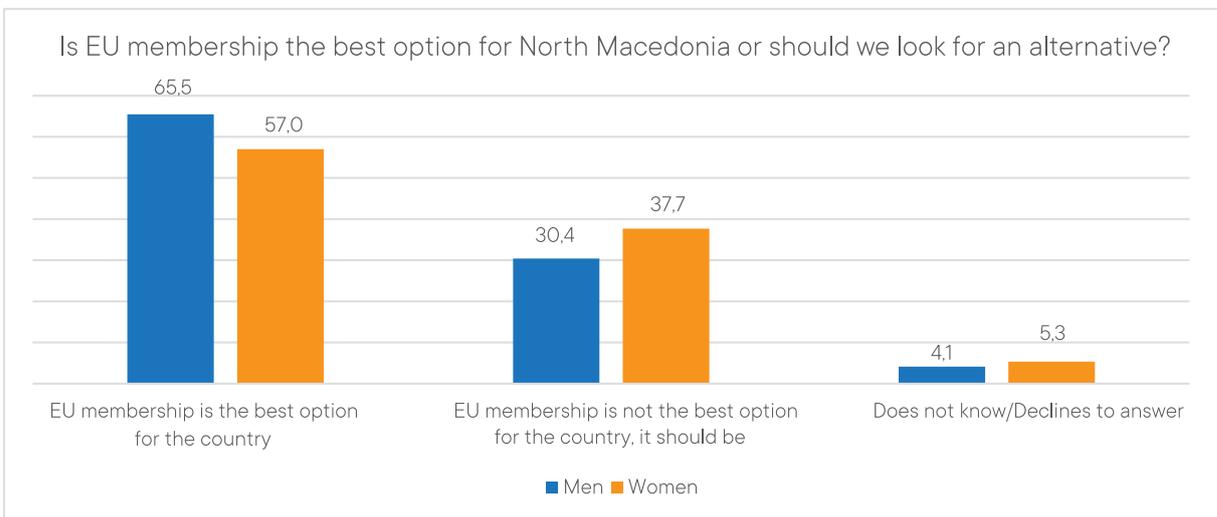


Figure 22: Is EU membership our best option, by gender

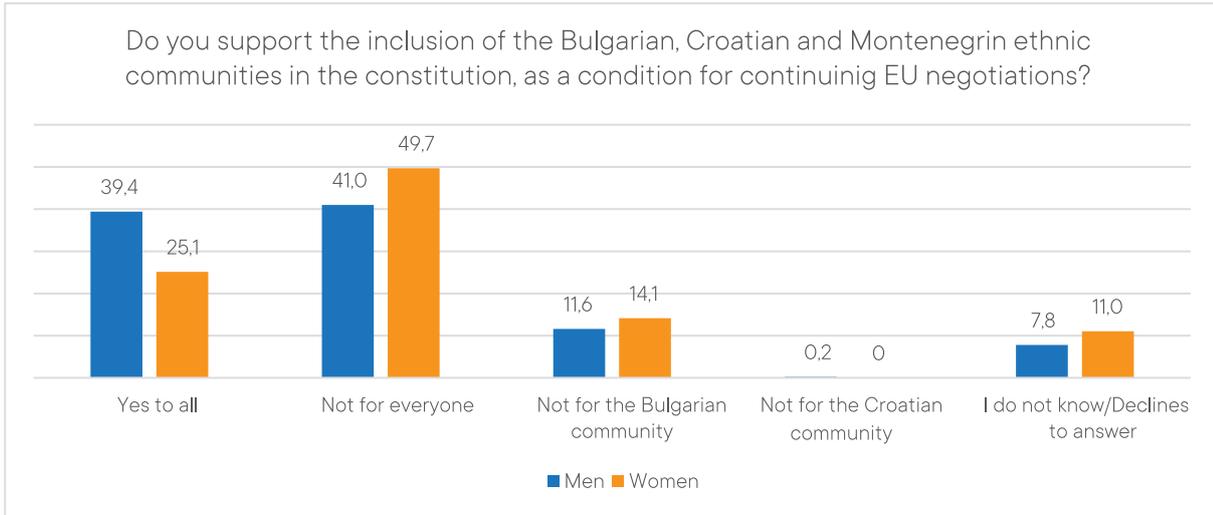


Figure 23: Support for constitutional changes, by gender

More information on this topic in Section 12 of the Annex.

Age

Similarly, age does not seem to play an important differentiator in views regarding the EU. Younger people seem to be a bit more pro-EU, but not in large numbers. In terms of age, most of our respondents seem to be rather homogenous when asked about reasons to join or not the EU, as well as the reason why we are not a member of Union already.

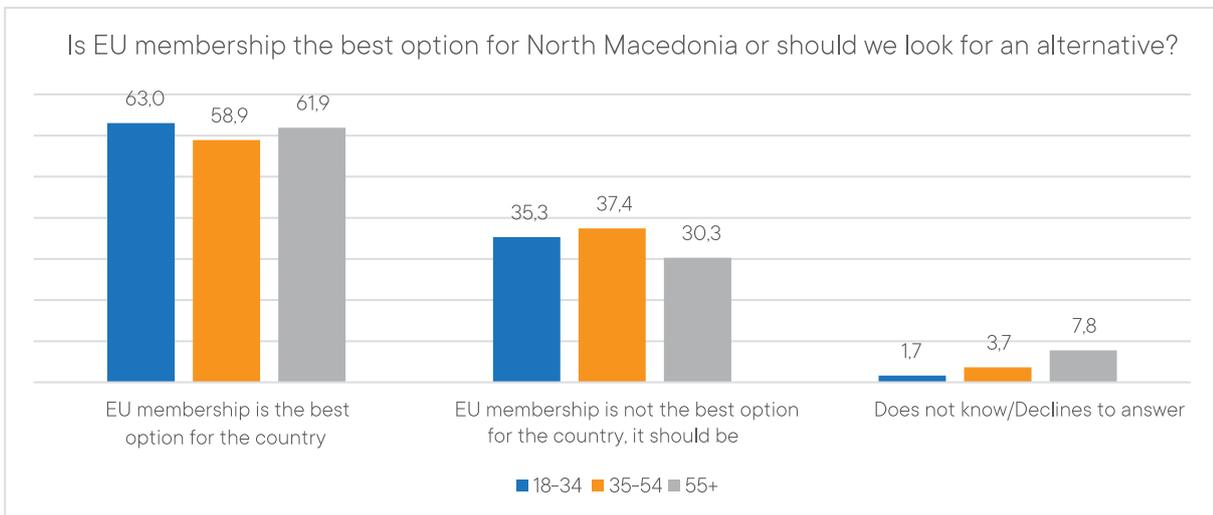


Figure 24: Is EU membership our best option, or should we search for an alternative, by age group

Additional graphs and information could be found in Section 13 of the Annex.

Ethnicity

Albanians seem to be more pro-EU, while also being more self-critical. On the other hand, Macedonian participants seem to be more willing to blame the neighbours and the EU for our lack of EU membership. The starkest difference comes when asked about the constitutional amendments, where most Albanians support the inclusion of the three smaller ethnic communities, while most Macedonians oppose it.

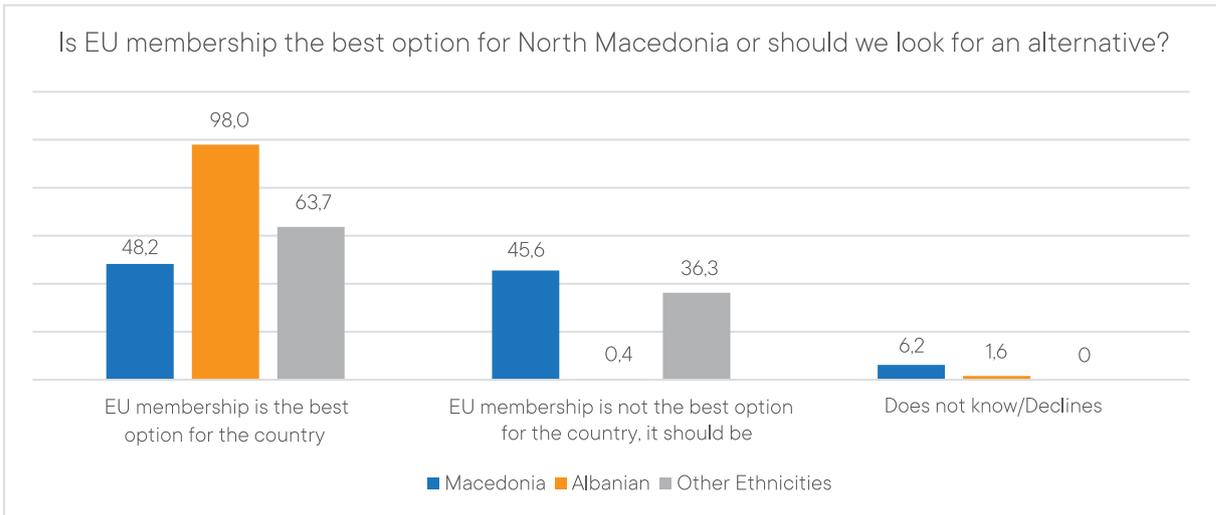


Figure 25: EU membership or alternatives, by ethnicity

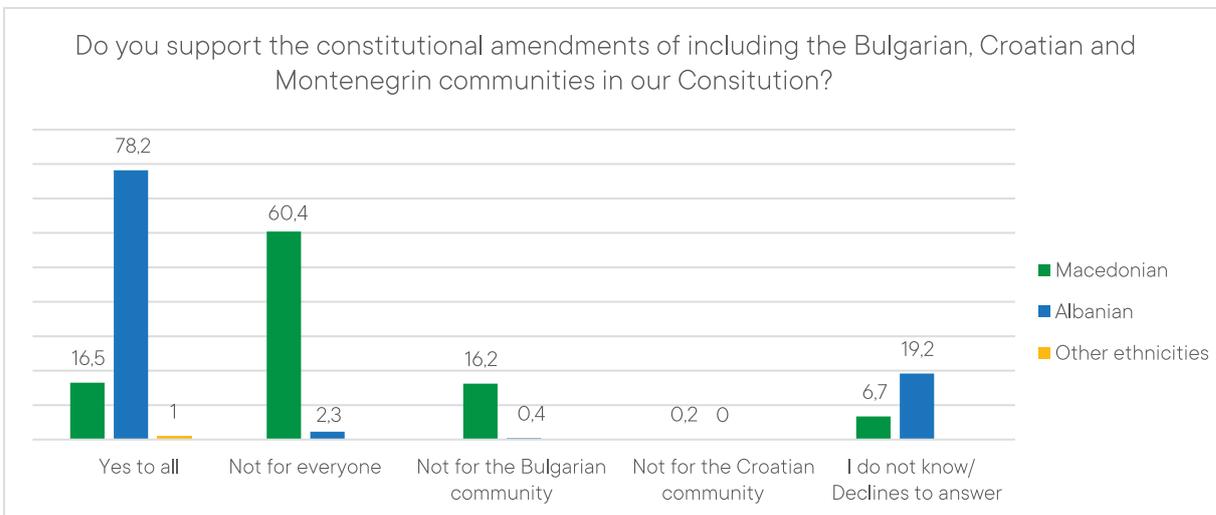


Figure 26: Support for including the various ethnic communities in the Constitution, by ethnicity

The remaining graphs can be found in Section 14 of the Annex.

Political Party Preference

VMRO and Levica supporters who took part in this survey are significantly more likely to be Eurosceptic than all the other parties. This trend is similar to the earlier noted trend of VMRO-DPMNE and Levica supporters aligning on issues concerning our closest neighbours. Supporters of SDSM find the lack of domestic reforms and the blockades from the neighbours as the main reasons for North Macedonia not being a member yet.

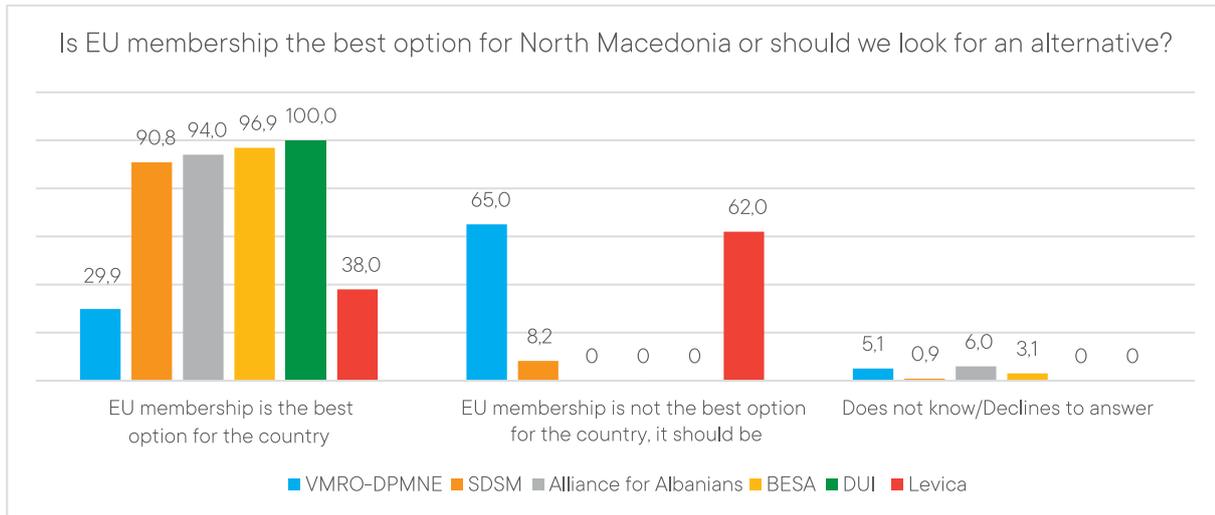


Figure 27: Is EU membership the best option, by Political Party Preference

Additional graphs with more information on the political party preference and EU membership is located in Section 15 of the Annex.

4. Media Consumption

Overall

Most of our participants get their news from the TV and they seem fairly undecided as to how truthful they are (for all groups, the curve on the question of disinformation appears to be very close to the ideal bell curve of distribution in statistics where data is most naturally distributed, implying that our participants are not strongly leaning towards believing or disbelieving news). Most of the participants follow domestic media outlets, with TV Sitel being a favourite. When asked about foreign media, most respond with either media from Serbia or none.

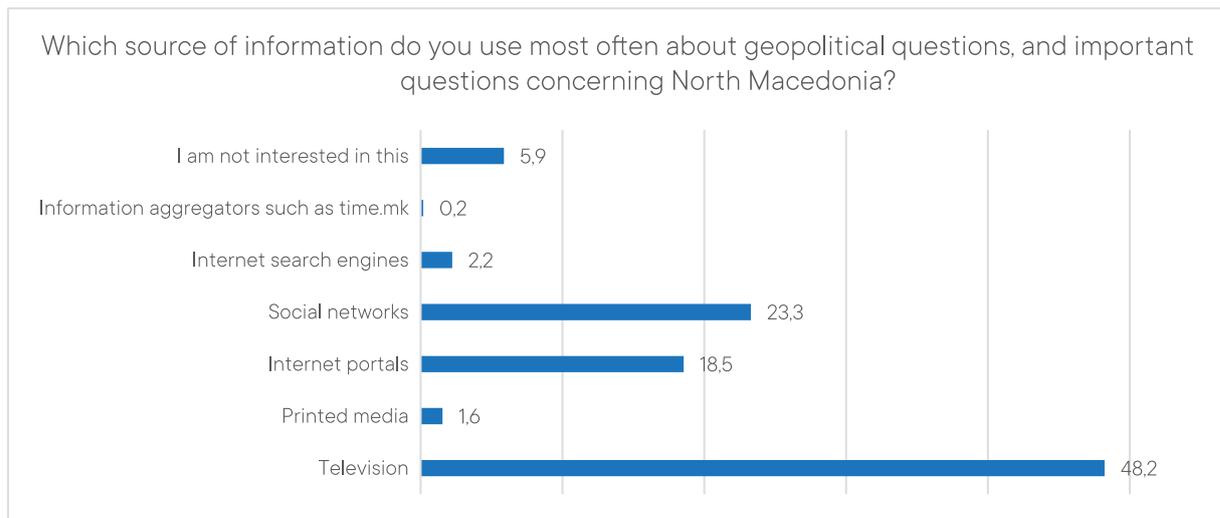


Figure 28: Sources of information

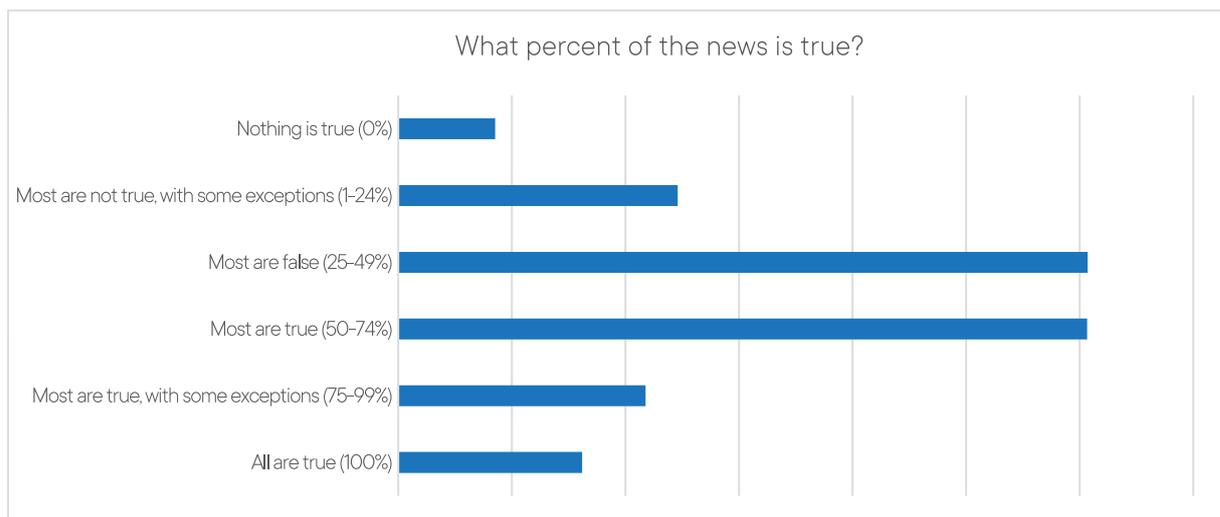


Figure 29: Percentage of news that is truthful

More graphs and information on this topic are presented in Section 16 of the Annex.

Gender

Women tend to consume news through TV more than men Figure 30 and seem to trust domestic media a bit more. However, for most of our questions, we do not find big differences between the media consumption of men and women. For full information, see Section 17 of the Annex.

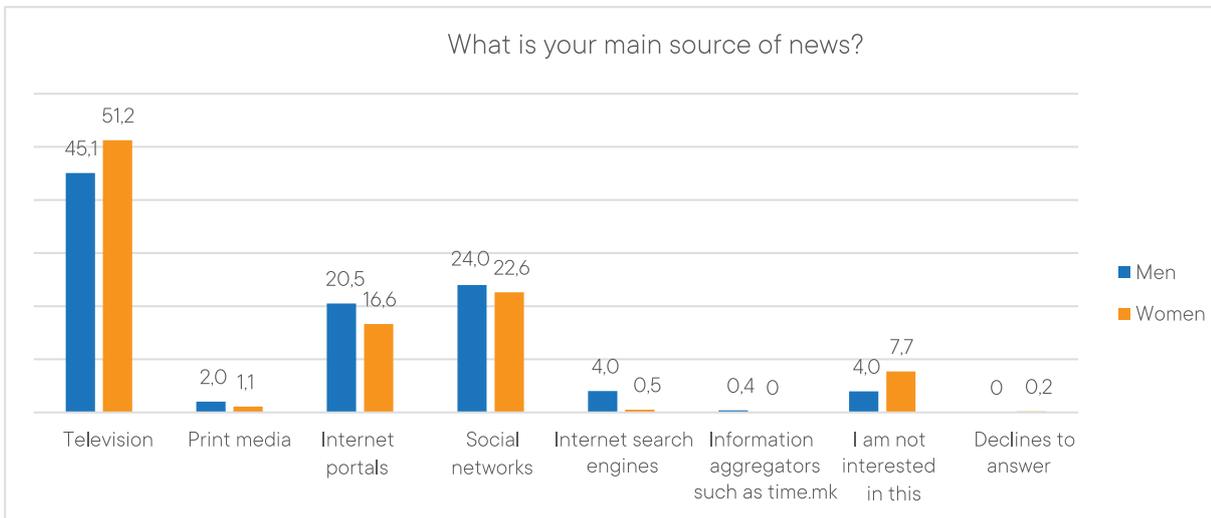


Figure 30: Main source of news, by gender

Age

TV is the favourite source of information for those aged 55+, who seem to favour domestic media the most as well. Interestingly, in this section we find one of the few instances where there are greater differences in preferences between the age groups. Younger people also tend to believe that most news cannot be trusted, unlike older cohorts. It is apparent (from Section 18 of the Annex) that young people have the lowest confidence in domestic media as well.

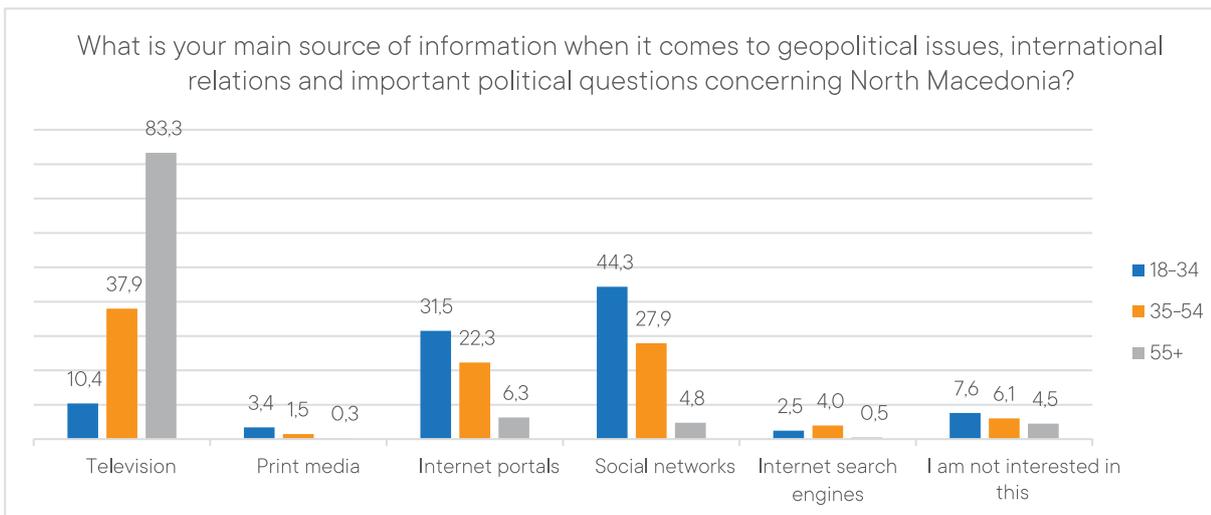


Figure 31: Source of information, by age group

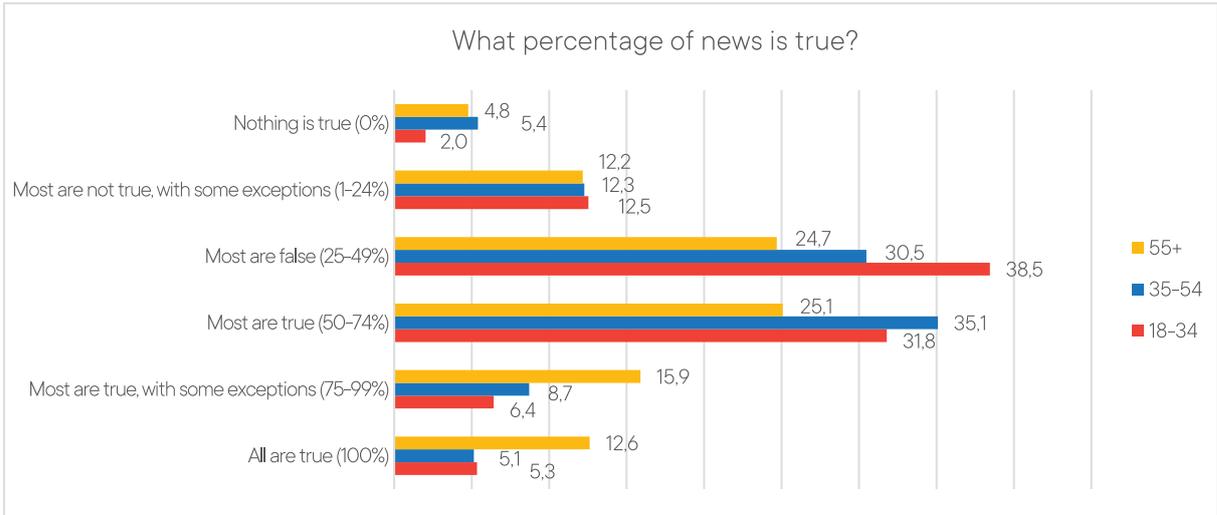


Figure 32: Percentage of news that is true, by age group

Ethnicity

Albanians seem to trust social media a bit more than Macedonians and other ethnicities, who prefer the TV (Fig. 97). Also, Albanians report less consumption of domestic media and greater reliance on media from Albania and Kosovo (Fig. 99). Alsat TV is by far the most popular one amongst Albanians, with the Macedonians and other ethnicities having a much more fragmented domestic media consumption. In terms of trust in media, there are some noticeable differences, with Macedonian participants reporting greater confidence than Albanian participants.

Full overview available in section 19 of the Annex.

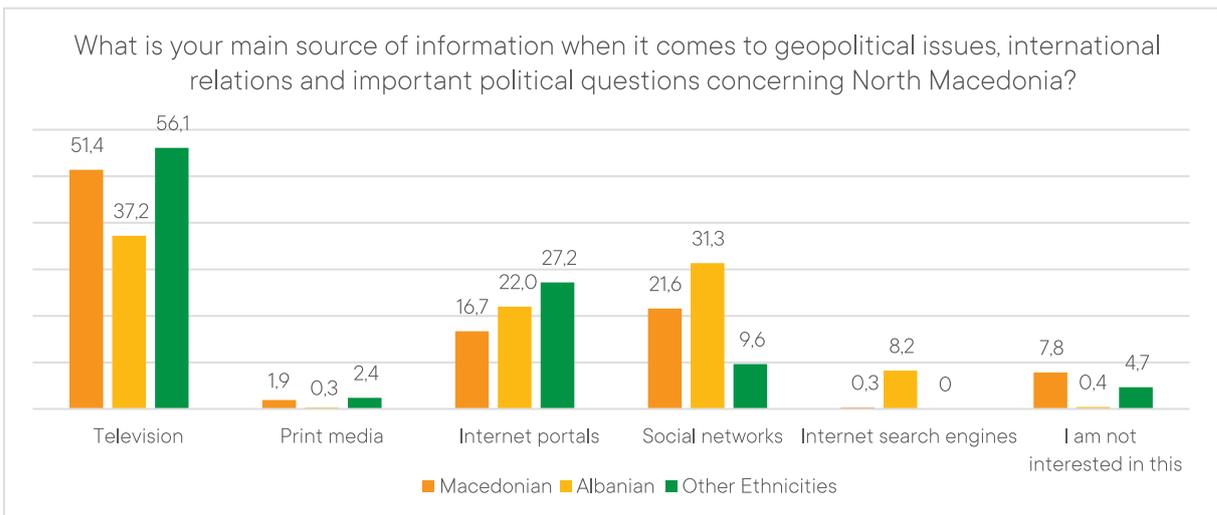


Figure 33: Source of informing, by ethnicity

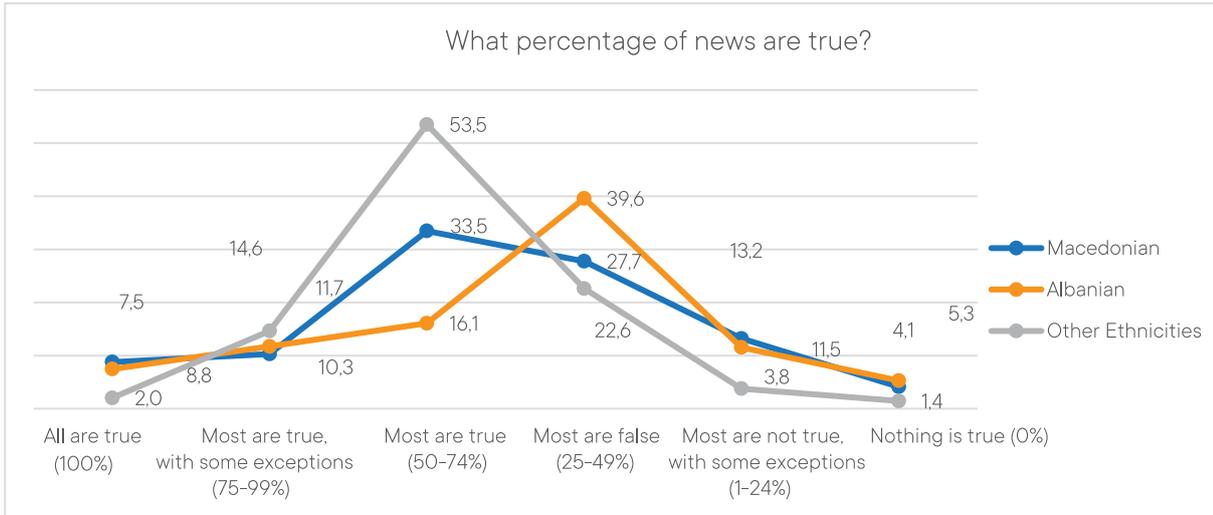


Figure 34: Percentage of news that are fake, by ethnicity

Political Party Preference

Social media is the preferred choice of information for Levica, while most of the other political party supporters choose various TV stations. Overall, supporters of the predominantly Macedonian political parties tend to follow news sources in Macedonian, or from Serbia, while Albanians lean more towards those from Albania and in Albanian. Supporters of Levica are the only ones who are leaning towards believing that more news are fake, with their bell curve being skewed to the right (Figure 36 of Section 20 in the Annex.)

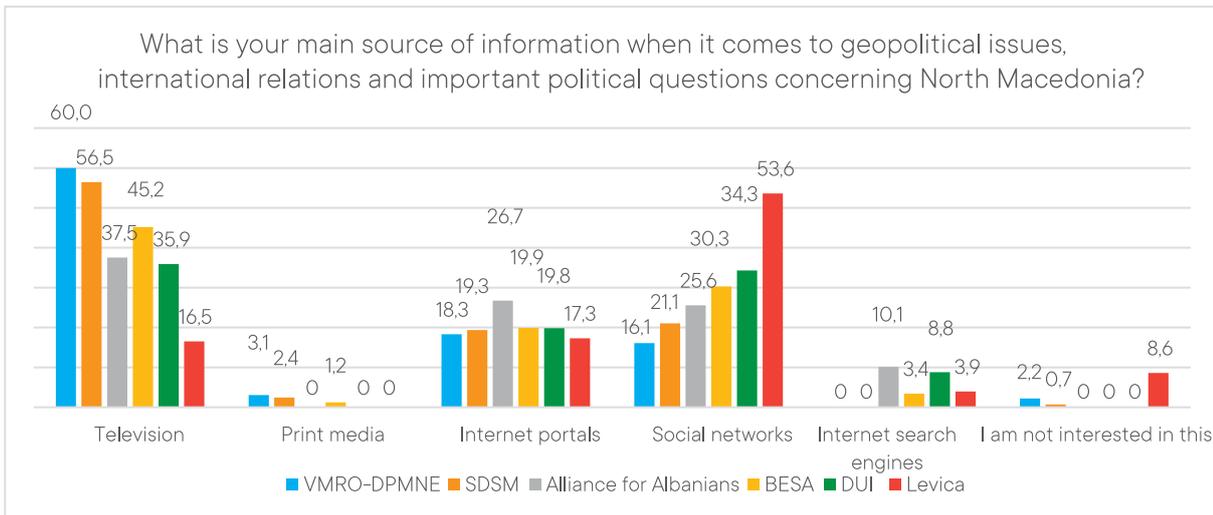


Figure 35: Sources of information, by Political Party Preference

5. Voting preference

The descriptive statistics in the part of the report are interesting beyond the general numbers and percentages. Particularly noteworthy are the differences between the various categories we observe. DUI, and to a lesser extent the Alliance for Albanians, BESA and Levica, have much greater support from the male participants in our survey. On the other hand, more women tend to support VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM. A worrying fact is that more women than men expressed they will not vote, do not know who they would vote for or refuse to respond.

Not surprising, the oldest voters seem most motivated to vote. Only BESA and DUI fare a bit better with younger participants, while a significant percentage of younger and middle-aged participants intend to boycott the elections (17.6% and 17.8% respectively). This is definitely a worrying fact, especially when taken together with the percentage of voters who refuse to answer or simply don't know who they would vote for.

In terms of ethnicity, there is a continuation of the ethnic divide, mostly between Macedonian and Albanian parties. The only political party that manages to even dent this division is SDSM who was the preferred choice for less than 2% of our Albanian participants.

Overall

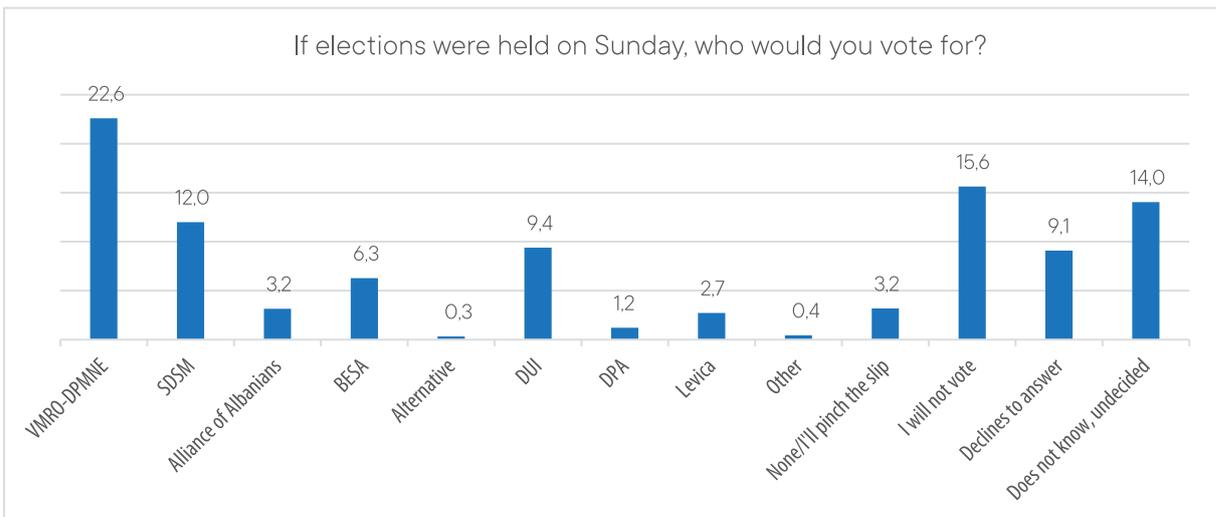


Figure 36: Voting preference, overall

Gender

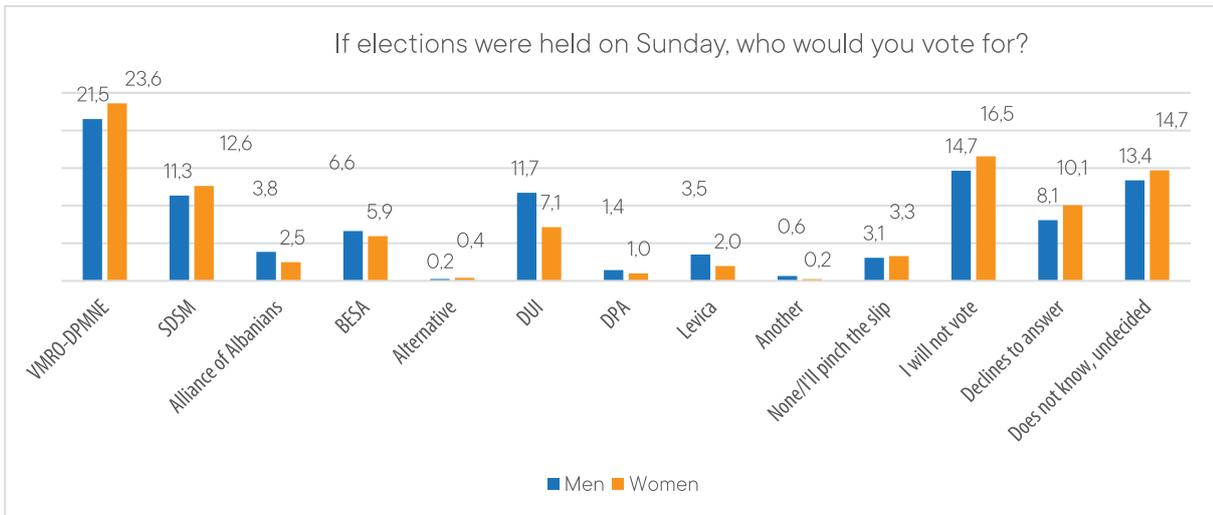


Figure 37: Voting choices, by gender

Age

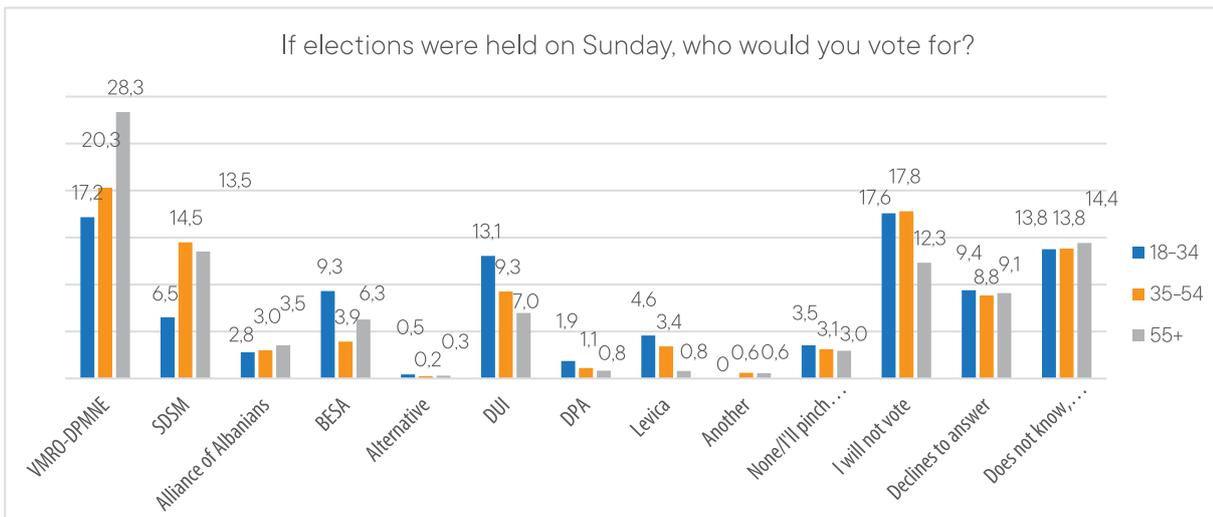


Figure 38: Voting choices, by age group

Ethnicity

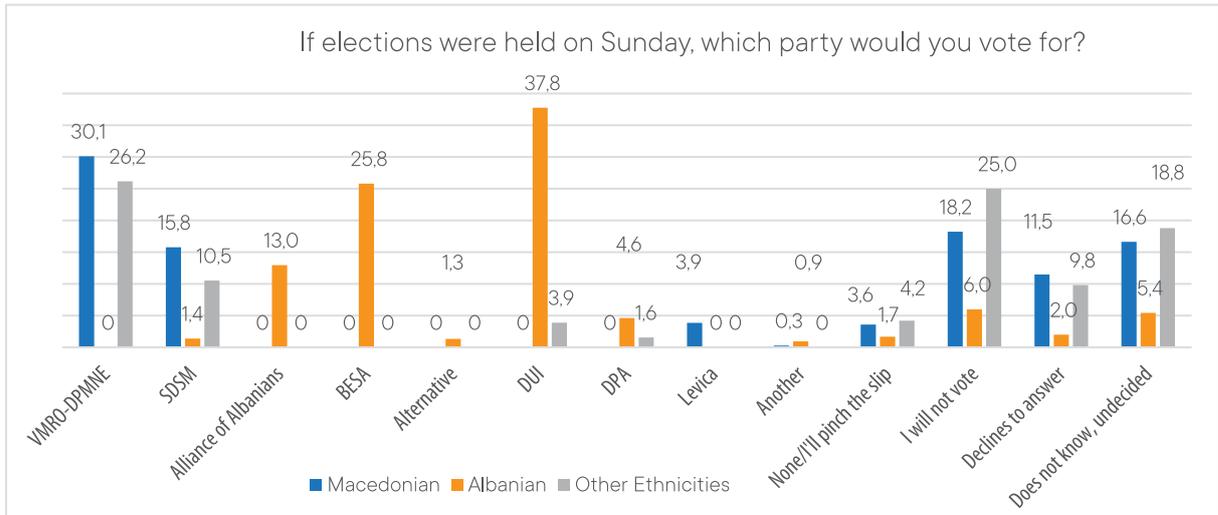


Figure 39: Election preferences, by ethnicity

III. Inferential Statistics

The descriptive statistics tell us the characteristics of the sample we have collected, but they cannot tell us whether these characteristics are extendable to the entire population or if we could confirm or reject any hypotheses. In order to answer these questions, we ran several regressions with a number of variables such as ethnicity, gender and age. In the next paragraphs, we select the most important and statistically significant findings.

When it comes to selecting North Macedonia’s best friend, gender plays a role in only several occasions. Women are twice as likely as men to identify Kosovo as a friend, five times more likely to identify Russia as a friend and twice as likely to say they do not know which one is a friend, compared to saying that no country or alliance is a friend.

Age makes even less of a difference. The older people get, there is a 6% lower chance of them identifying Greece as a friend and 2% greater chance they will say they do not know who the friend is, as opposed to saying that no country or alliance is a friend.

Ethnicity plays a significantly greater role. Albanians are 75 times more likely to say Albania is a friend, as opposed to no one is a friend. Macedonians have 92% lower odds of saying Albania is a friend, as opposed to no one is a friend. Similarly, Albanians are 142 times more likely to say Kosovo is a friend, compared to Macedonians presenting odds close to 0, as compared to no one is a friend. Austria, Slovenia, Canada, China, Japan, and Russia are friendlier according to ethnic Macedonians, while Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Switzerland, the US and NATO are friendlier according to Albanians. Here, it is important to note that being more popular with one group does not necessarily mean a negative score with the other.

Which country or international alliance is North Macedonia’s best friend?	
Macedonians	Albanians
“I Do Not Know” *	NATO*
Russia*	USA*
USA*	“I Do Not Know” *
Austria*	Switzerland*
NATO*	Italy*
Slovenia*	Greece*
China*	Bulgaria*
Greece*	Kosovo*
Japan*	Albania*
Bulgaria*	EU*
Canada*	Turkey
Euro-Asian Union*	Germany
Serbia	Japan*
Italy	Montenegro
EU*	Serbia
Croatia	Russia*
Turkey*	China*
Switzerland*	Canada*
Albania*	Slovenia*
Germany*	Austria*

Montenegro*	Euro-Asian Union*
Kosovo*	Bosnia and Herzegovina*
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	Croatia*

*Table 40: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.*

When asked about who contributed the most to North Macedonia’s democratic development, age plays only a small role in the 9% less likely to identify Bosnia and Herzegovina as contributing, 7% less likely to choose China and 1% more likely to say no one, for every year of increase in age.

Women are 4 times more likely to choose Kosovo, 34,000 times more likely to choose Austria, 12,000 times more likely to choose France and almost 3 times more likely to say they do not know, than to say no one. Women are less likely to choose Montenegro, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, than to say no one.

Ethnicity yields the greatest differences, again. Albanians are more likely to choose Albania, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, the US, NATO and the EU, than to say no one. Ethnic Macedonians are more likely to choose Montenegro, Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, China, and Russia.

Which country or international alliance has helped North Macedonia’s democratic development the most?	
Macedonians	Albanians
China*	Albania*
Russia*	France*
Greece*	Italy*
The Netherlands*	Bulgaria*
Belgium*	Switzerland*
Slovenia*	Kosovo*
Bulgaria*	USA*
France*	NATO*
Austria*	EU*
Albania*	Germany
Switzerland*	Austria*
Italy*	Serbia
USA	Turkey
I Do Not Know	The Netherlands
Serbia	I Do Not Know
EU	Belgium*
NATO	France*
Germany	Slovenia*
Turkey*	Russia*
Croatia*	China
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	Croatia*
Kosovo*	Bosnia and Herzegovina*

*Table 2: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.*

When asked a similar question on who has helped North Macedonia’s economic development the most, age plays a statistically significant factor only in that, as the age of our participants increases, they are 3% more likely to say they do not know. Women are more likely to choose Kosovo, Austria, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and refuse to answer, even the second time around. They are also less likely to choose Belgium, Slovenia, and the US.

Albanians are more likely to choose Albania, Kosovo, Austria, Greece, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, and NATO, than no country at all. Ethnic Macedonians are more likely to choose Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Ukraine, China, Japan, and Russia.

Which country or international alliance has helped North Macedonia’s economic development the most?	
Macedonians	Albanians
China*	Kosovo*
Russia*	Austria*
Greece*	Slovenia*
The Netherlands*	Albania*
Japan*	Saudi Arabia*
Belgium*	NATO*
Euro-Asian Union	Italy*
Ukraine*	Greece*
Bulgaria*	Russia*
NATO*	Switzerland*
Switzerland*	The Netherlands*
Slovenia*	Poland*
Refuses to answer after repeated question	Bulgaria*
EU	EU
I Do Not Know	USA
Serbia*	Turkey
USA	Germany*
Germany*	Montenegro*
Turkey*	Belgium*
Italy*	I Do Not Know*
Albania*	Croatia*
Kosovo*	Serbia*
Croatia*	Japan*
Austria*	China*
Poland*	Euro-Asian Union*
Saudi Arabia*	Refuses to answer after repeated question*
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	Bosnia and Herzegovina*
Kosovo*	Ukraine*

*Table 3: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.*

In terms of shared values and interests, ethnic Macedonians are significantly more likely to select choose Russia, compared to choosing no country. Interestingly enough, Greece and Bulgaria are also more likely to

be selected by Macedonians. On the other hand, Albanians see Bulgaria, the EU and Italy, or refuse to answer the question, as compared to choosing no country. When analysed side by side, it seems that Albanians and Macedonians prefer similar sets of countries when it comes to shared values and interests (Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, EU, Italy).

Which country or international alliance do we share the most values and interests with?	
Macedonians	Albanians
Russia*	Bulgaria*
Greece*	Refuses to answer after repeated question*
Bulgaria*	EU*
Belgium*	Italy*
USA*	Switzerland*
Hungary*	Hungary*
EU*	Greece*
Italy*	Belgium*
Serbia*	USA*
Refuses to answer after repeated question*	Kosovo*
I Do Not Know*	Albania*
Albania*	Serbia*
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	I Do Not Know*
Kosovo*	Russia*
Montenegro*	Germany*
Croatia*	Turkey*
Germany*	Bosnia and Herzegovina*
Romania*	Montenegro*
Switzerland*	Croatia*
Turkey*	Romania

*Table 4: The * countries have statistical significance. The countries in yellow have higher odds of being selected as “best friend” to North Macedonia by the ethnicity in question, as compared to choosing “no country is a friend”.*

When considering what drives support for EU accession, we had some telling findings. Figure 41 below tells us that the higher the educational level of our citizens, the more they consider EU membership to be the best option (increasing the level of education for one unit, increases the likelihood of support for EU membership 1.7 times, compared to stating “I don’t know”). On the other hand, the older citizens have a slightly lower likelihood of supporting EU membership with 0.965 times, or 4% lower.

Do you consider EU membership to be the best option for the country or should we seek an alternative?

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	1	2
	EU membership is the best option (1)	EU membership is NOT the best option (2)
gender	0.862 (0.326)	1.068 (0.330)
age	0.984 (0.011)	0.965*** (0.011)
edu	1.691*** (0.195)	1.195 (0.197)
mk	0.00001*** (0.505)	0.00001*** (0.503)
alb	0.0001*** (0.510)	0.00000*** (0.962)
Constant	706,346.800*** (0.791)	1,866,094.000*** (0.798)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,318.009	1,318.009
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Figure 41: Is EU membership our best option?

On the question of how they would vote if an EU accession referendum is held on Sunday, the results are similar, but not the same. More educated people are twice as likely to vote ‘Yes’. However, the anger from the Macedonian ethnic community is still quite high. So, a Macedonian citizen is more than 5,000 times more likely to say they would not vote than to say they do not know how they would vote. This tells us that Macedonians are highly opinionated in their views of the EU. Again, higher age leads to a small decrease in support for an EU referendum¹.

1 We don’t have information on whether the intended meaning of an “EU accession referendum” is truly understood amongst our population. Given that a referendum was held for the Prespa Agreement with Greece, which included a reference to EU accession, it is possible that at least a number of our respondents don’t have the best grasp of what an EU accession referendum means.

If an EU accession referendum is held this Sunday, how would you vote?

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	1	2	3	4
	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't Know (3)	I wouldn't vote (4)
gender	0.592 (0.566)	0.781 (0.569)	0.606 (0.621)	0.546 (0.730)
age	0.978 (0.018)	0.964** (0.018)	0.983 (0.020)	0.960* (0.023)
edu	2.097** (0.346)	1.488 (0.347)	1.574 (0.374)	0.758 (0.470)
mk	0.00002*** (0.955)	0.00003*** (0.965)	0.0001*** (1.085)	5,878.820*** (1.258)
alb	0.0002*** (1.066)	0.000*** (0.00004)	0.00003*** (1.456)	0.036*** (0.0001)
Constant	1,159,793.000*** (1.329)	2,162,156.000*** (1.343)	58,094.990*** (1.573)	0.011*** (1.257)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,611.354	1,611.354	1,611.354	1,611.354
Note:	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01			

Figure 42: How would you vote if an EU accession referendum is held this Sunday?

Support for Constitutional Changes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	1	2	3	5
	Yes to all (1)	No to all (2)	No for the Bulgarian community (3)	No for the Croatian Community (4)
gender	0.503*** (0.246)	0.874 (0.254)	0.888 (0.296)	0.0004*** (2.630)
age	1.002 (0.008)	0.979*** (0.008)	0.976*** (0.009)	1.090 (0.094)
edu	1.437*** (0.135)	0.937 (0.138)	0.966 (0.160)	0.965 (1.073)
mk	0.145* (1.043)	0.402 (1.026)	0.211 (1.047)	27.813 (2.618)
alb	0.293 (1.041)	0.005*** (1.103)	0.001*** (1.448)	0.006*** (0.006)
Constant	12.647* (1.305)	103.026*** (1.297)	55.151*** (1.383)	0.024 (2.586)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,934.490	1,934.490	1,934.490	1,934.490
Note:	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01			

Figure 43: Support for constitutional amendments

One of the few statistically significant gender differences we found was on the question of including the Bulgarian ethnic community in the preamble of our Constitution. Women are 50% less likely to agree to include the Bulgarian, Croatian and Montenegrin communities, compared to saying “I don’t know”. For every unit increase in age, the citizens tend to be less supportive of including anyone, but also particularly including the Bulgarian community. Again, higher education means a higher likelihood of accepting these changes (1.4 times more likely).

IV. Experimental Analysis

The fact that a small-sample experiment showed some statistically significant results shows that there is a strong effect for some of these topics. In particular, in this sample of 50 respondents per group, we find statistical significance for clickability on positive news related to Russia and the EU, as well as negative news about the EU and news about vaccines.

Beyond the statistical significance, the means calculated here are a difference-in-means for the treatment and control groups. The value of these differences-in-means can range from 0 to 1 in absolute terms. (A value higher than 1 would imply an issue with the construction of the experiment.) The numbers should be read as “[number x 100] is the percentage of people that would click/believe on a news article from a given topic”. So, for example, the negative news about the EU would be clicked on by 50% of our respondents, while the same news article, based on the title alone, would be believed by 44% of our respondents.

A note of warning: While we can confirm the statistical significance of the data we have denoted as statistically significant, we have too small of a sample to draw any significant conclusions about the exact number of the overall population that would act in the same way as our respondents. We can, however, confirm that the trends of believing or not, clicking or not, will be coherent with the overall population.

	Topic	Clickability Mean	Veracity Mean
1.	Government (positive)	0.12	-0.02
2.	Government (negative)	0.28	0.06
3.	Serbia (positive)	0.1	0.09
4.	Serbia (negative)	0.08	-0.08
5.	Turkey (positive)	0.38	0.01
6.	Turkey (negative)	0.34	0.05
7.	China (positive)	0.28	0.12
8.	China (negative)	0.1	0.28
9.	Russia (positive)	0.48*	0.2
10.	Russia (negative)	0.26	0.35
11.	NATO (positive)	0.24	0.38
12.	NATO (negative)	0.08	-0.01
13.	EU (positive)	0.52*	0.38
14.	EU (negative)	0.5*	0.44*
15.	Vaccines	0.56*	0.19
16.	Covid-19	0.26	0.31

Table 5: Means and statistical significance (denoted with *)

V. Conclusion

The vastness of the data collected in this study, through both the survey and experiment instrument, is fertile starting point for many further research endeavors. By scratching on the surface of several major aspects, we can hope to lay the ground for more in-depth research in the years to follow.

It is readily evident that the Macedonian society is deeply polarized along ethnic and partisan lines. These divisions set the course for the interpretation of world events, which in turn, gives rise to foreign policy positions. This study did not dive into the (im)mobility of these divides, which has important consequences for foreign policy. Have we become so partisan as a society that (at least some) foreign policy questions have become too dividing for national unity?

The current approval ratings of the European Union are some of the lowest we have noticed. While this study is able to observe the current state of opinions, it is necessary to further probe into two major questions: First, is the EU approval rating on a downward trend? And second, which factors, domestic or foreign, have a higher impact on the image of the EU? Are domestic Eurosceptic politicians simply riding the wave of popular dissatisfaction, or are they actively pushing the country's narrative further away from EU accession?

Less evident divides happen along gender lines. The role of gender in foreign policy, and the perception of foreign policy conditional on one's gender is an understudied topic in North Macedonia. Further research is needed to look into the reasons for the female conservatism, which in some instances, outpaces the male conservatism, at least in foreign policy. If women have different foreign policy views, do they build their outlook on different principles, or do they simply receive information from different sources?

The impact of media and media consumption on foreign policy is another potential topic for further study. Our experiment showed that there are topics which are highly likely to be used as clickbaits, while our survey showed that about half of the respondents trusted most of the news, if not all. While we did not detect any great media consumption from Russia directly, North Macedonia's society is highly porous to information and disinformation from Serbia. Given Serbia's close ties to Russia and the overall state of their democracy, this is a highly troubling fact, which merits further attention.

VI. Annex

Section 1 – Overall: International Cooperation and Relations

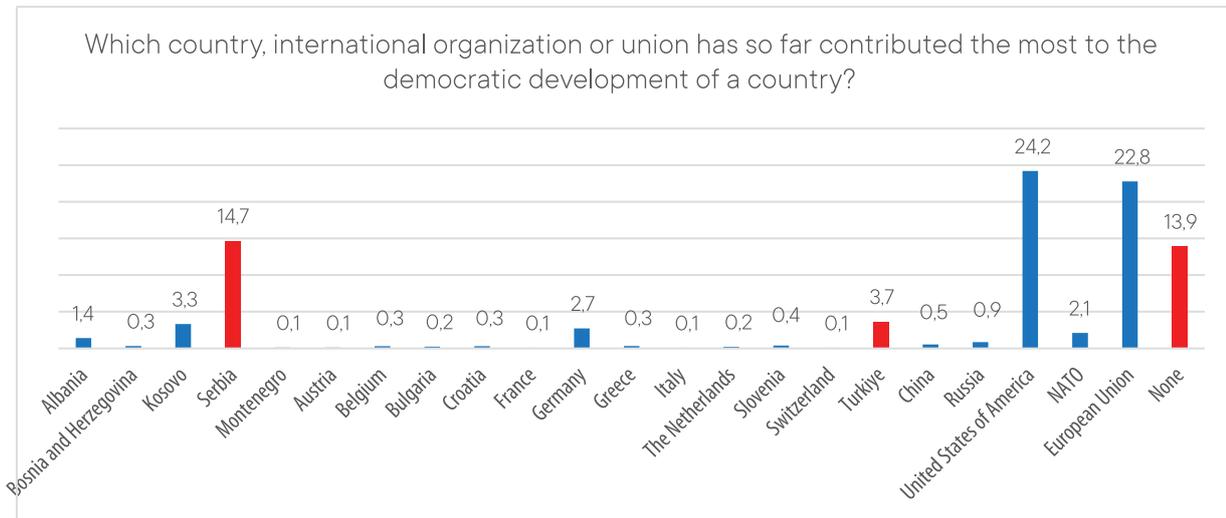


Figure 44: Biggest contributor to North Macedonia’s democratic development, across all age groups

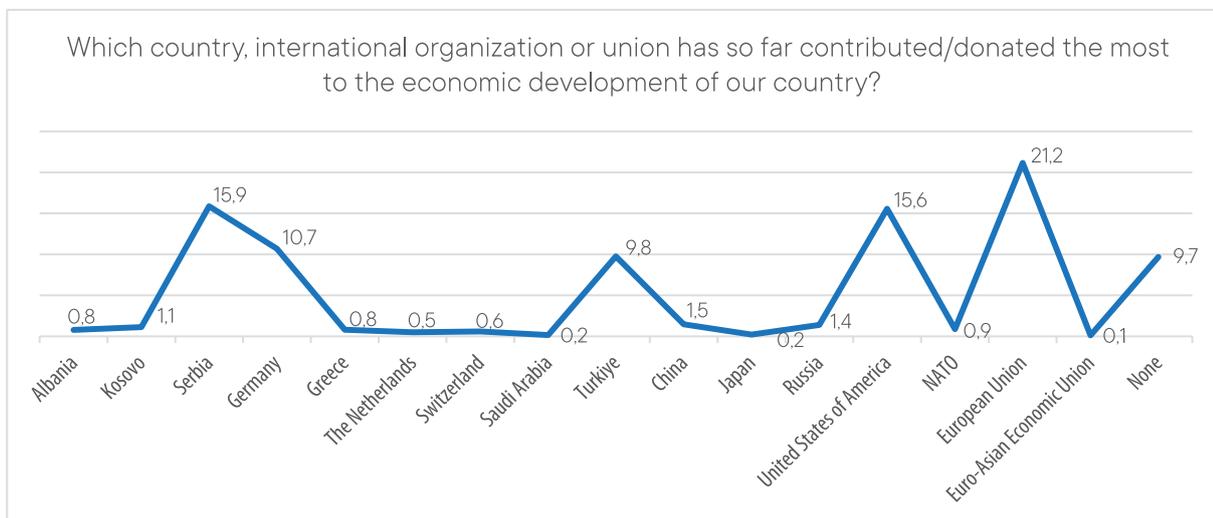


Figure 45: Biggest contributor to North Macedonia’s economic development, by age group

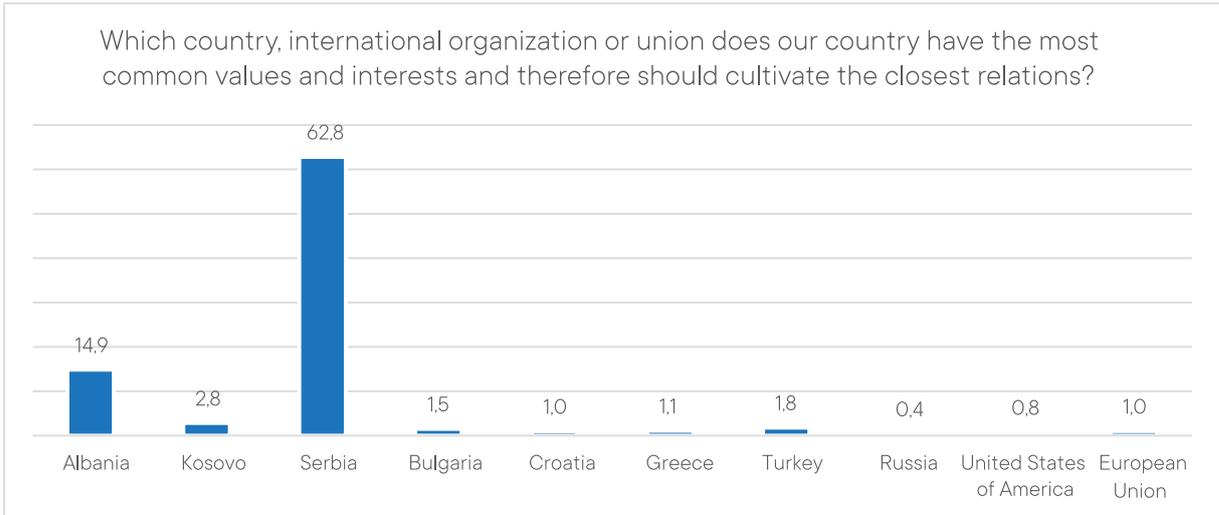


Figure 46: Closest relations due to common values and interests, across all age groups

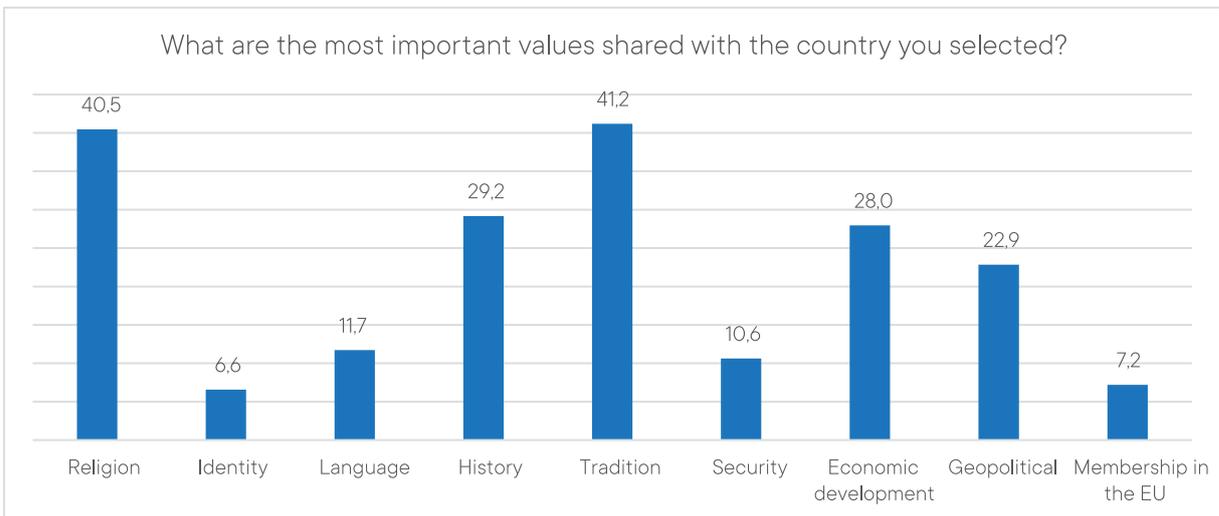


Figure 47: For the country you selected in the previous question, which values do we share?

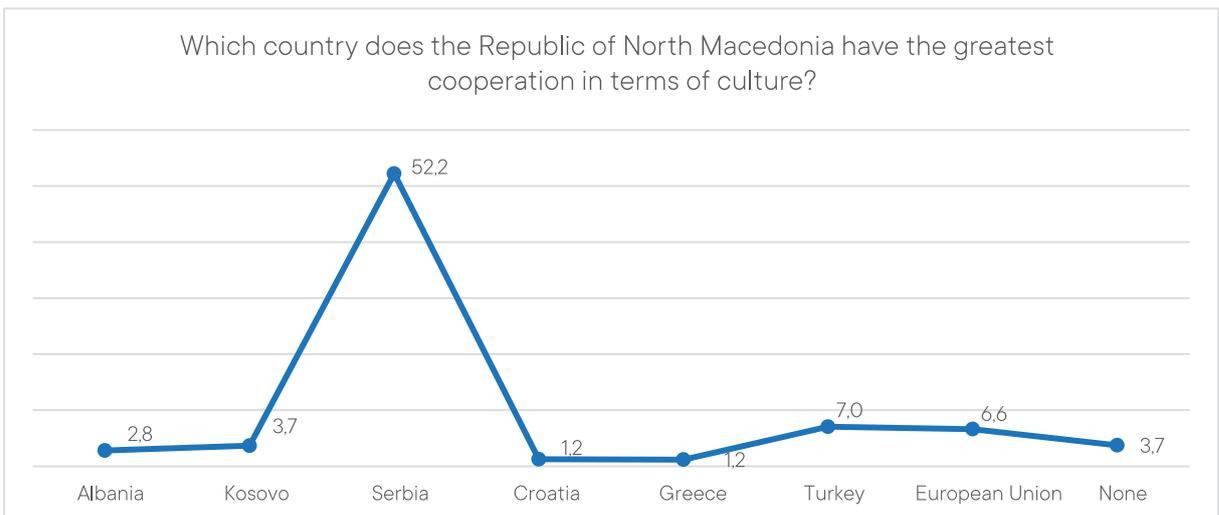


Figure 48: Best cooperation in the field of culture

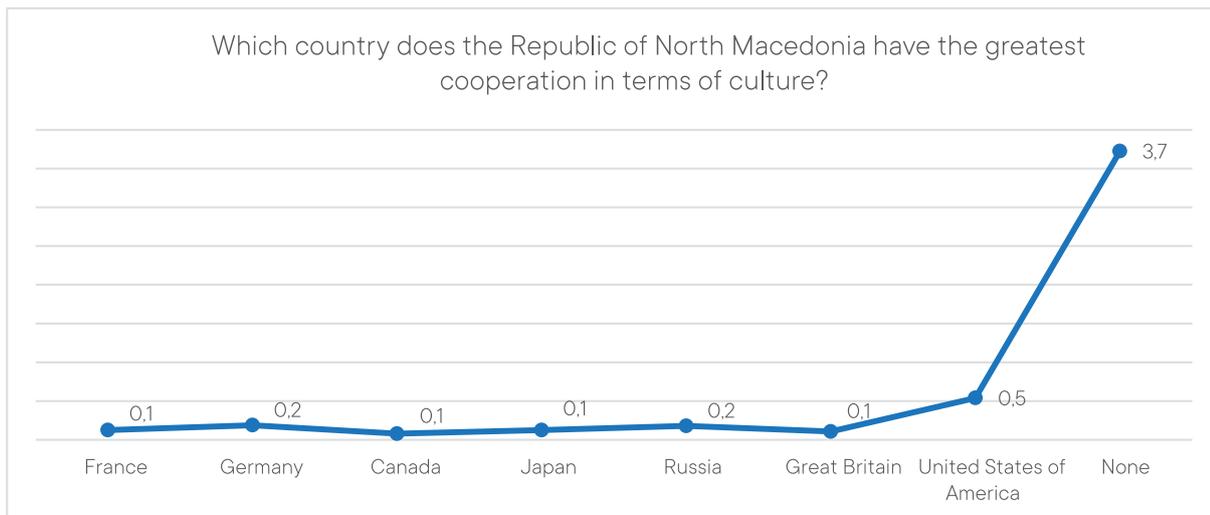


Figure 49: Best cooperation in the field of culture

Section 2: Gender – International Cooperation and Relations

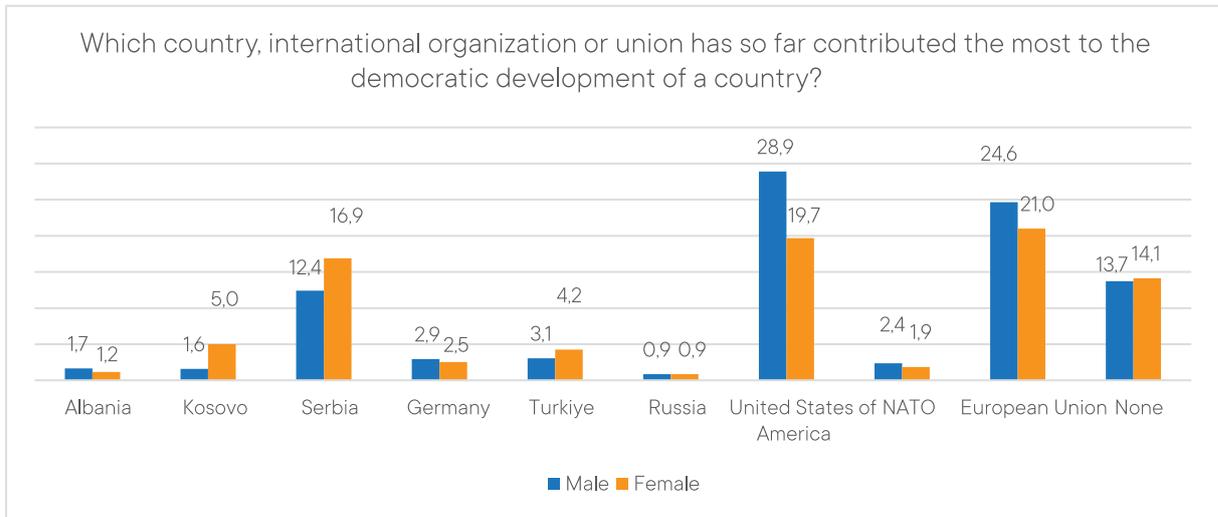


Figure 50: The country or international alliance that contributed the most to the democratic development of North Macedonia, disaggregated by gender

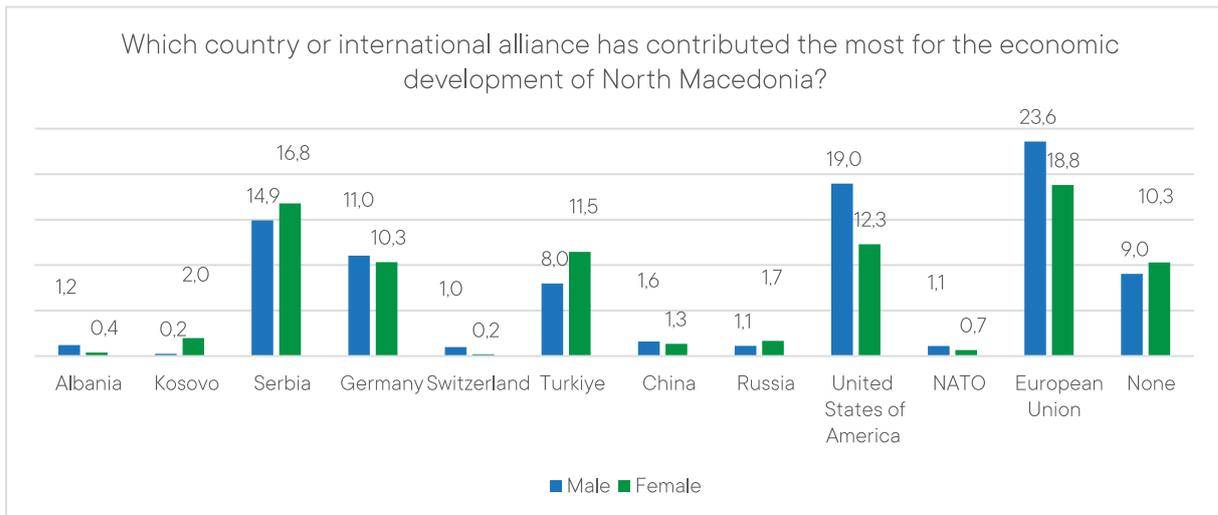


Figure 51: The country or international alliance that contributed the most to North Macedonia's economic development, disaggregated by gender

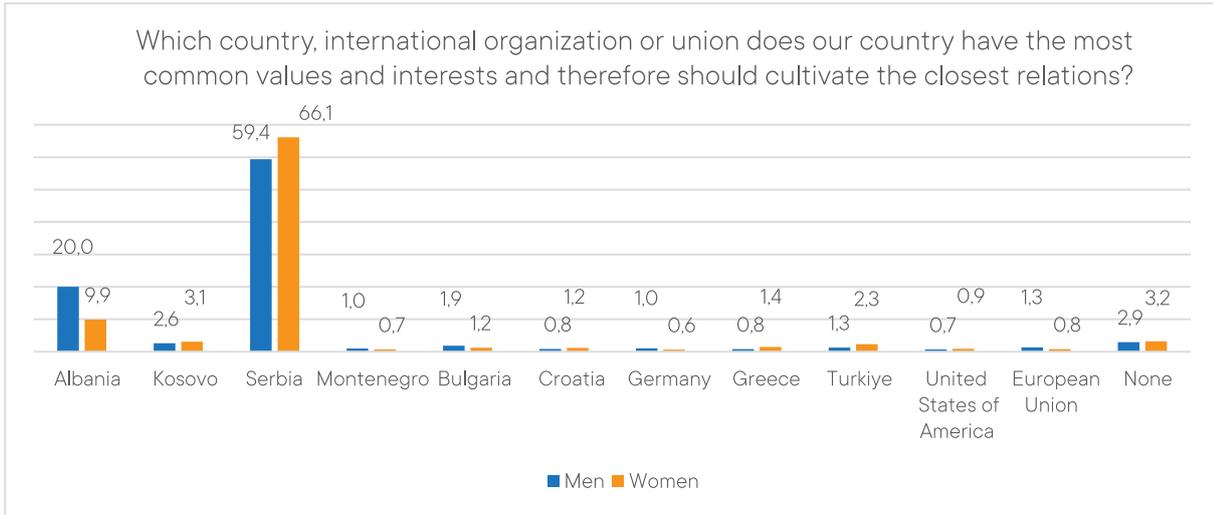


Figure 52: Which country or international alliance do we share the most values and interests with?

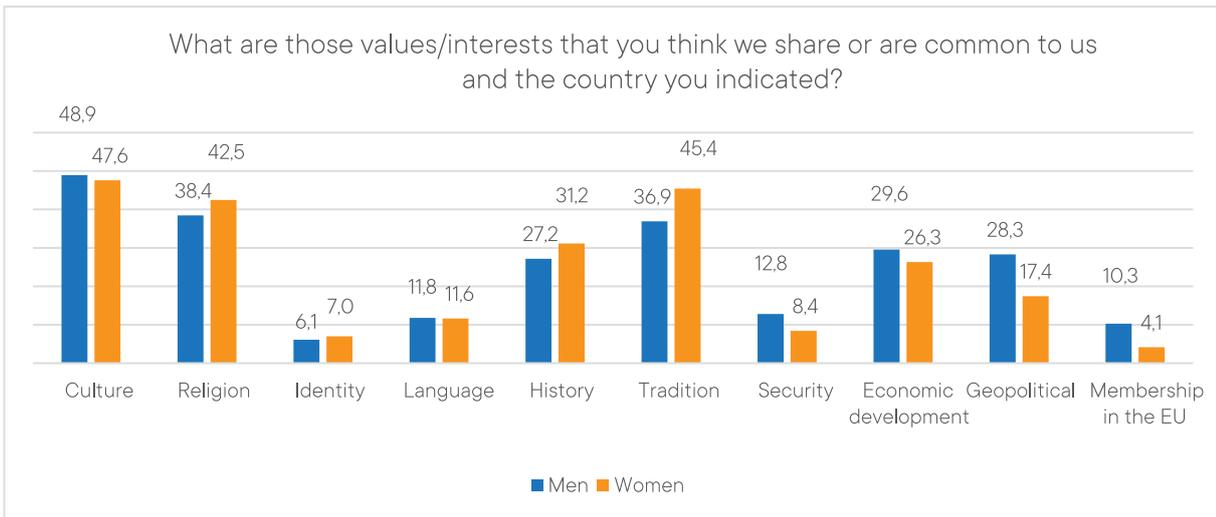


Figure 53: Most important shared values and interests, by gender

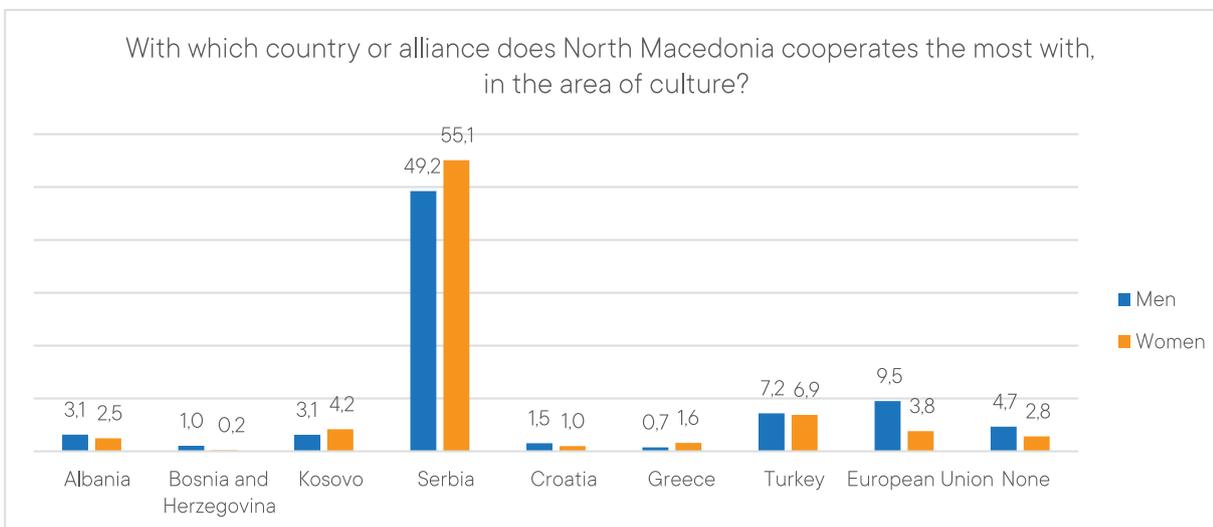


Figure 54: Most cooperation in the area of culture, by gender

Section 3: Age – International Cooperation and Relations

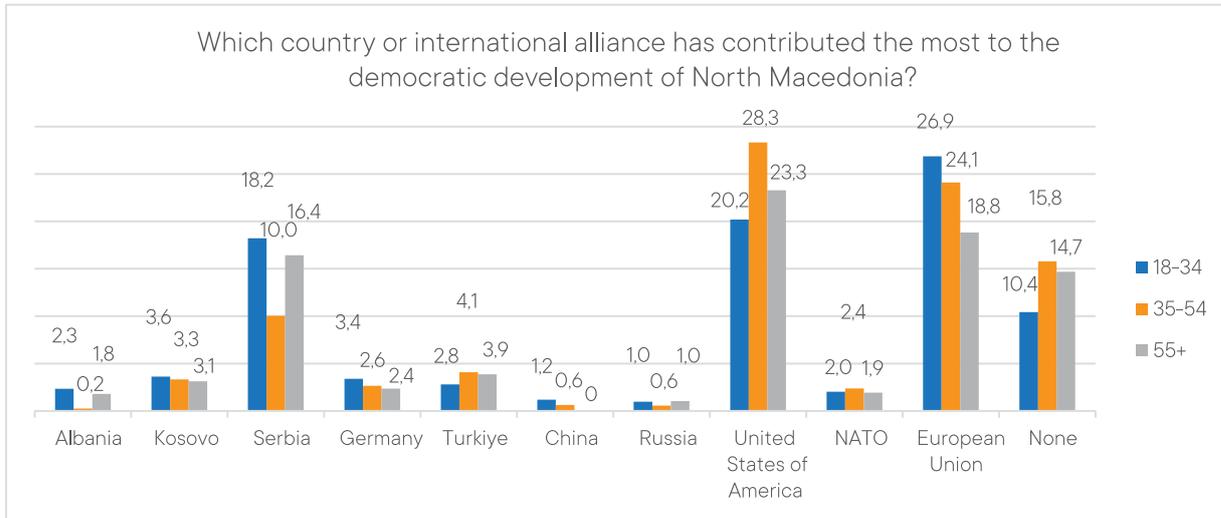


Figure 55: The country or alliance that has contributed the most to the democratic development of North Macedonia, by age groups

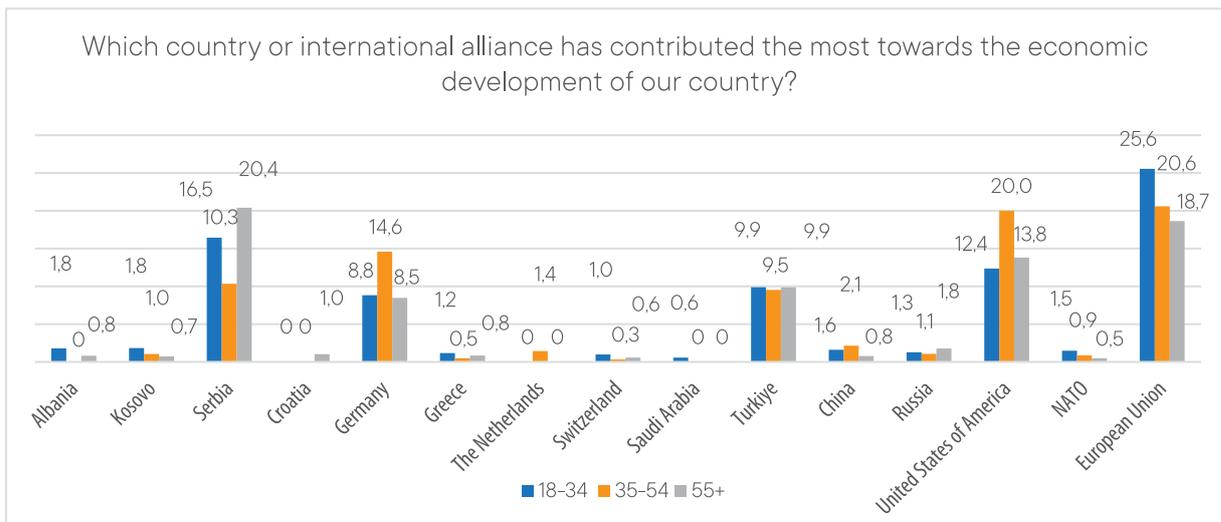


Figure 56: Which country or alliance has contributed the most to our economic development, by age groups

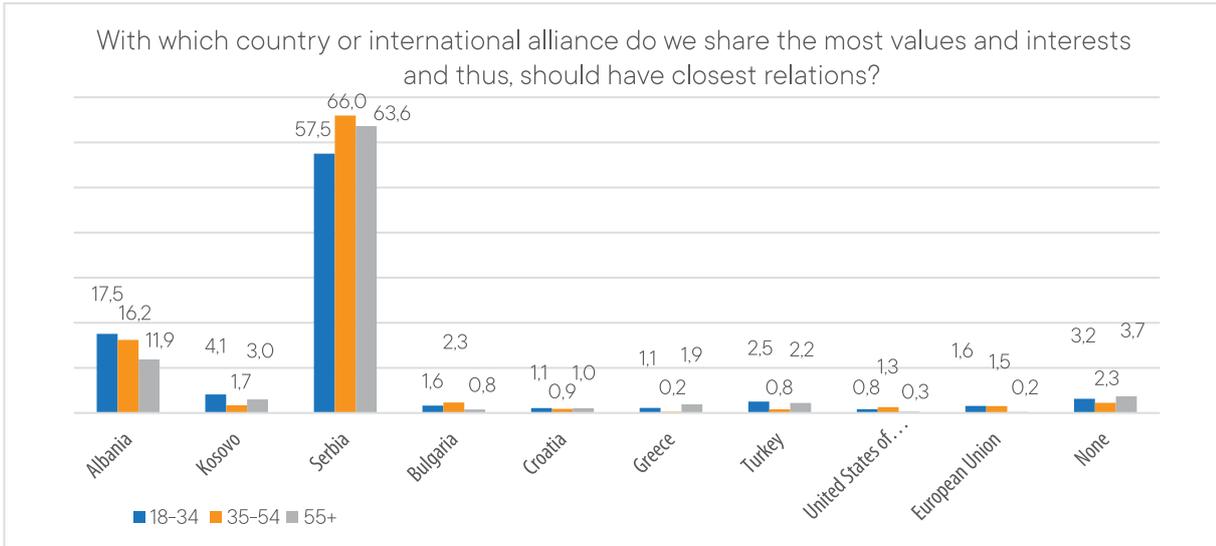


Figure 57: Country with the most shared values and interests, by age group

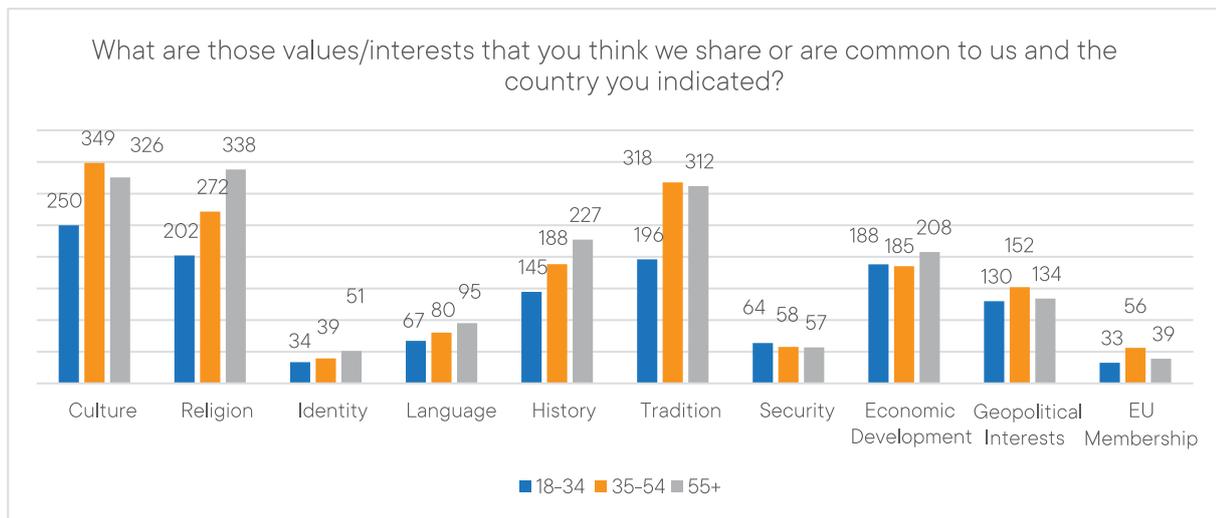


Figure 58: Most important values and interests shared with the country we share most values and interests, disaggregated by age groups

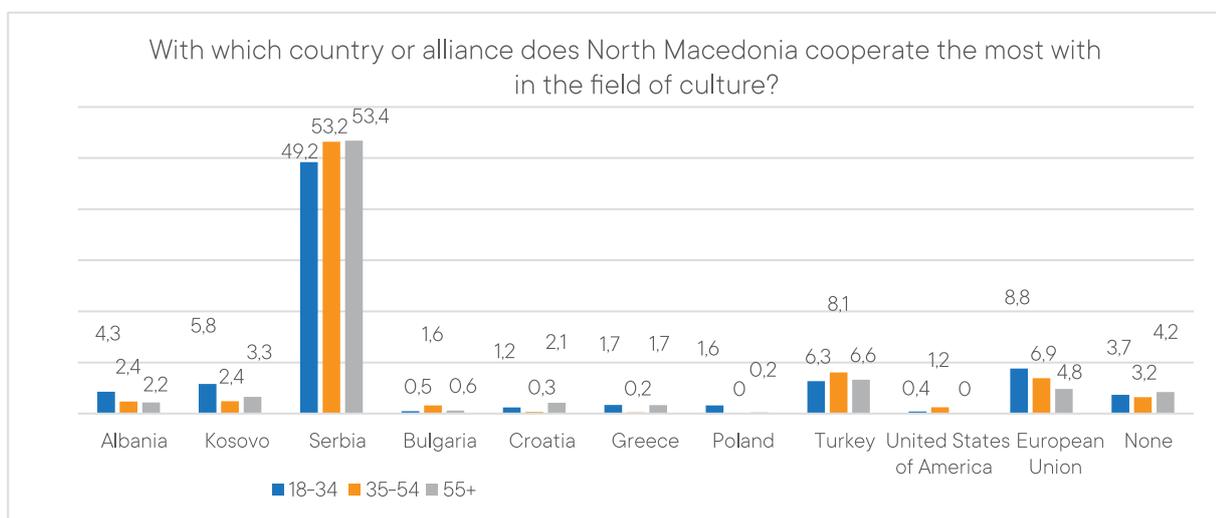


Figure 59: Cultural cooperation, by age groups

Section 4: Education – International Cooperation and Relations

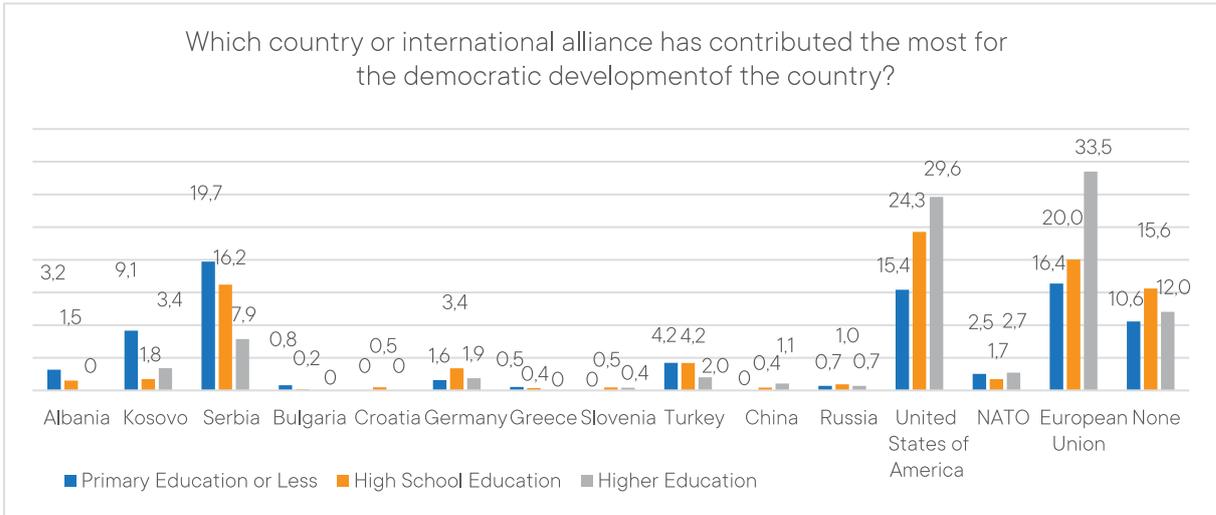


Figure 60: Which country or alliance has contributed the most to our democratic development, by education

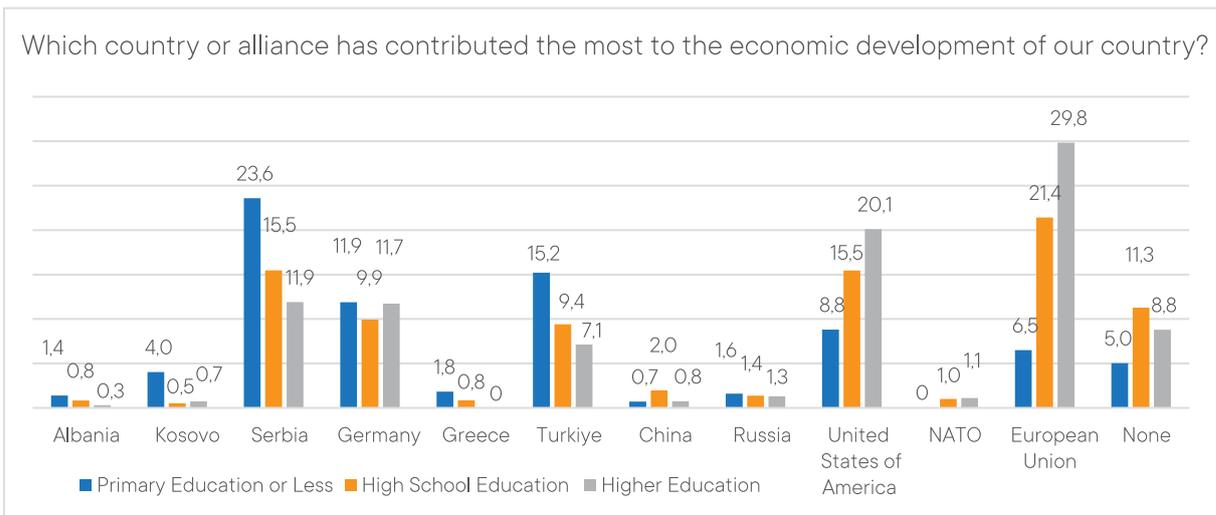


Figure 61: Which country or alliance has contributed the most for the economic development of our country, by education

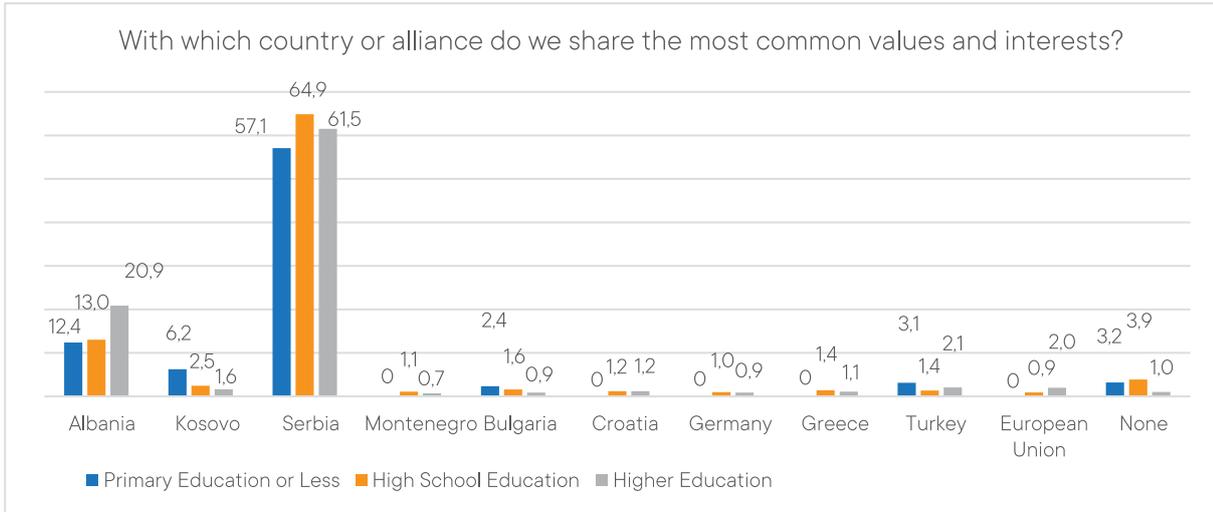


Figure 62: Most shared values and interests with another country or alliance, by education

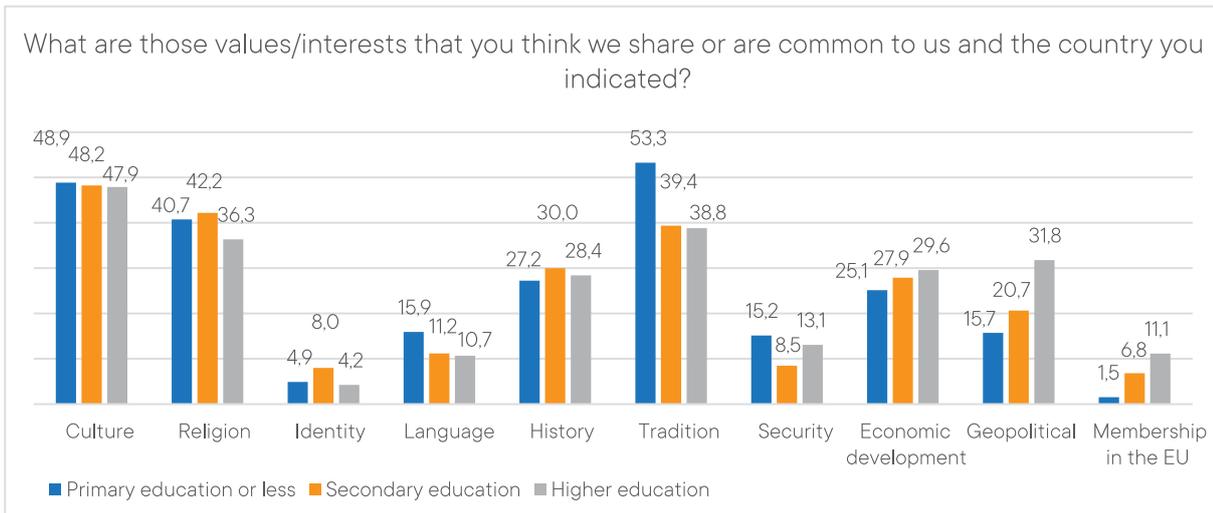


Figure 63: Which values or interests are shared, by education

Section 5: Ethnicity – International Cooperation and Relations

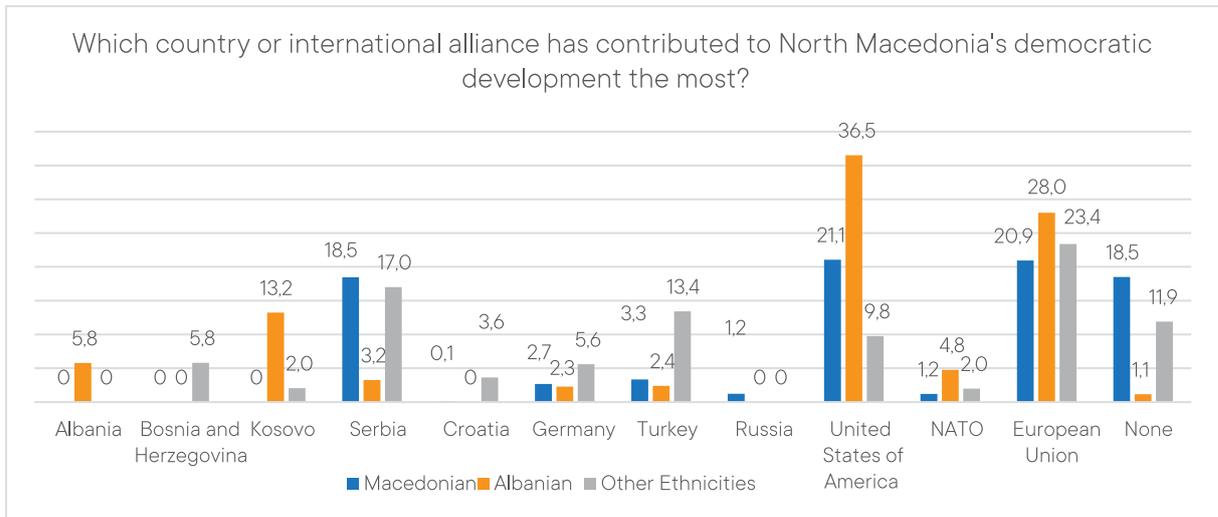


Figure 64: The country (or alliance) that has contributed the most to North Macedonia's democratic development, by ethnicity

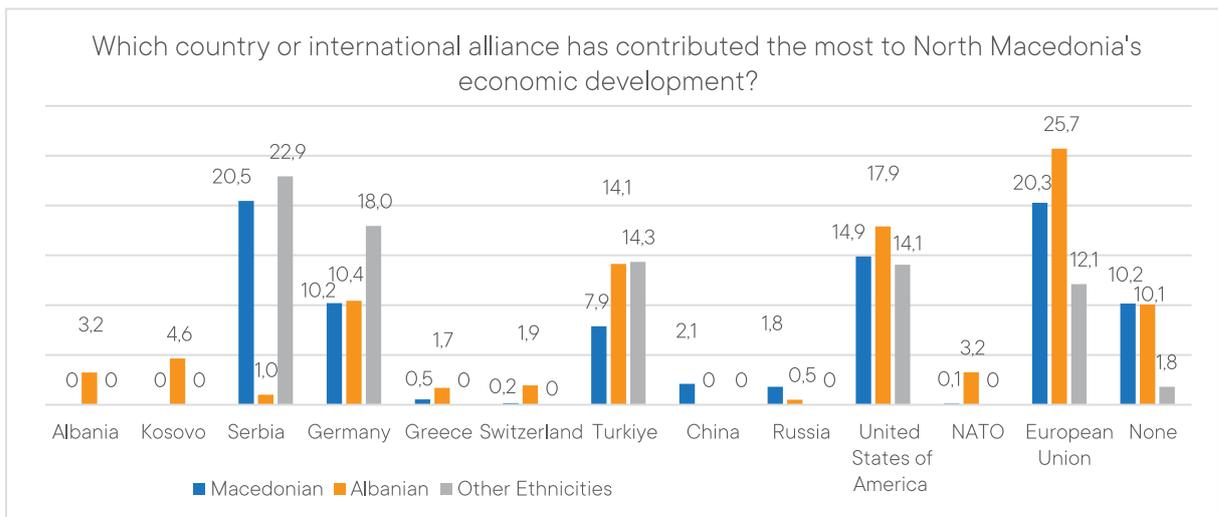


Figure 65: The country (or alliance) that has contributed the most to North Macedonia's economic development, by ethnicity

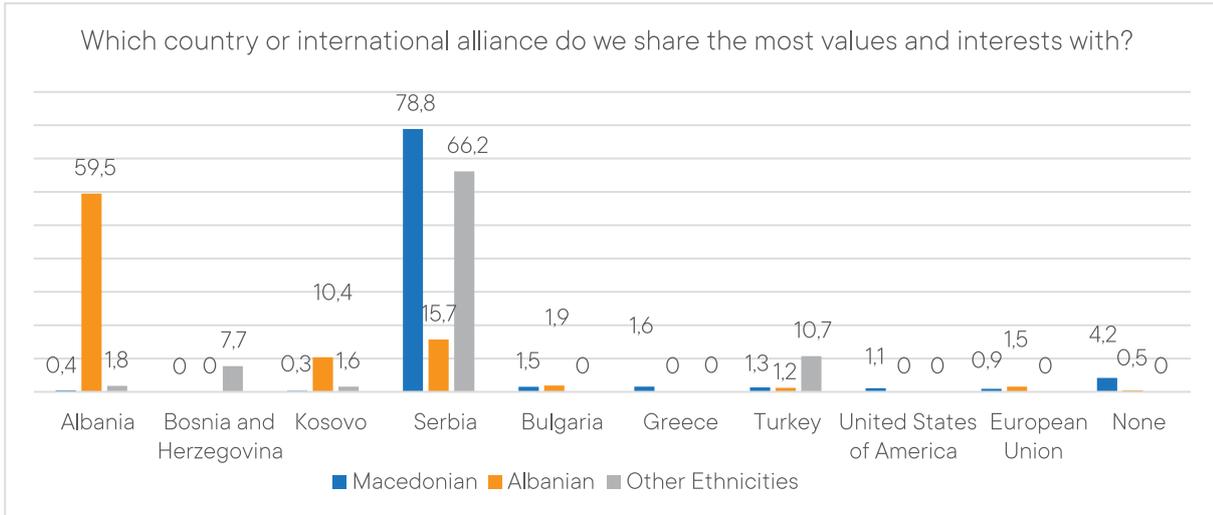


Figure 66: Shared values and interests, by ethnicity

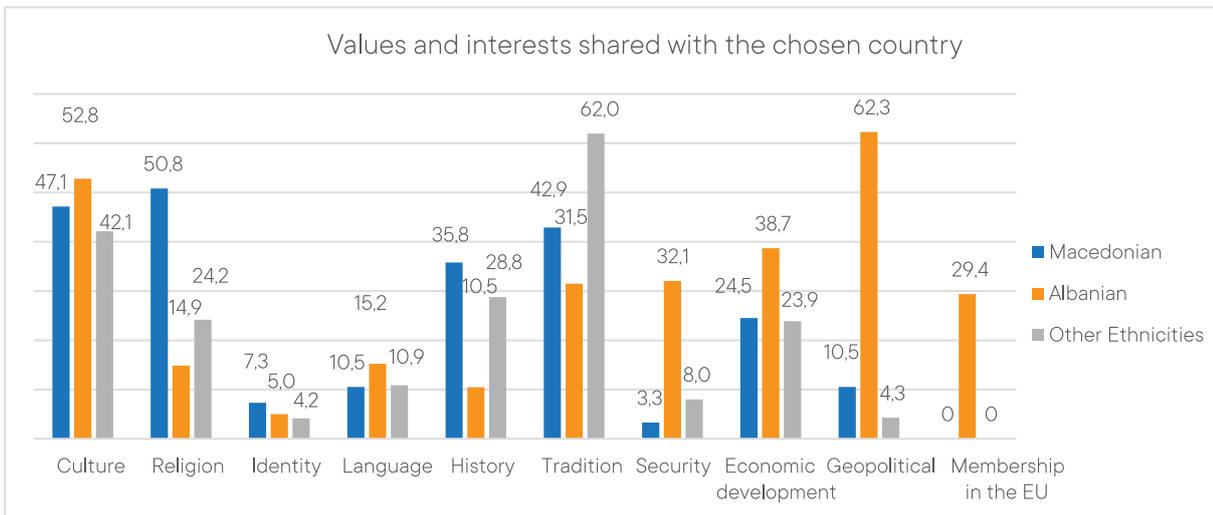


Figure 67: Values and interests shared with the selected country, by ethnicity

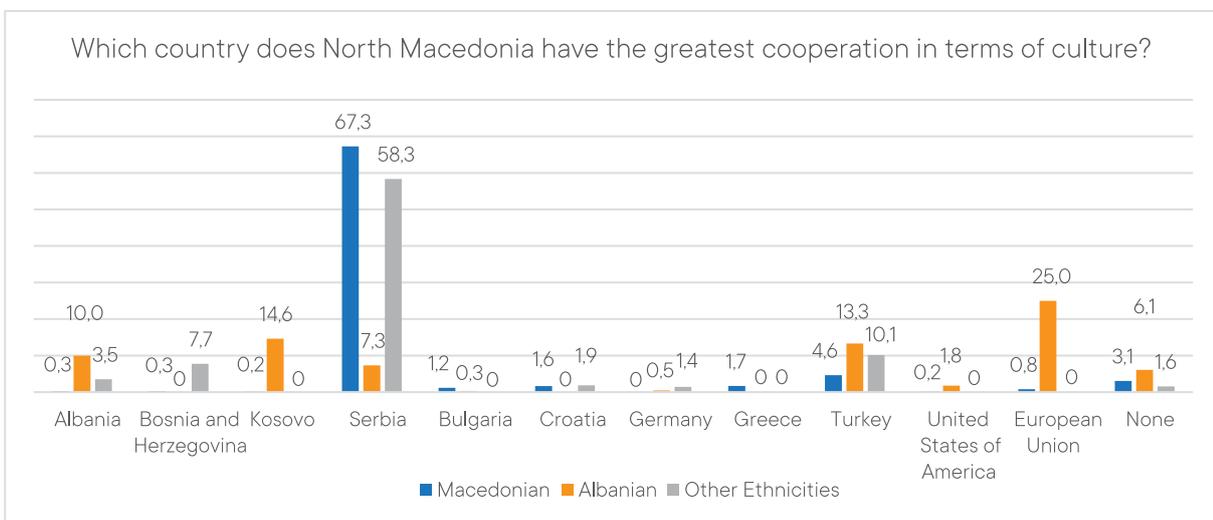


Figure 68: Closest cooperation in the area of culture, by ethnicity

Section 6: Party Preference - International Cooperation and Relations

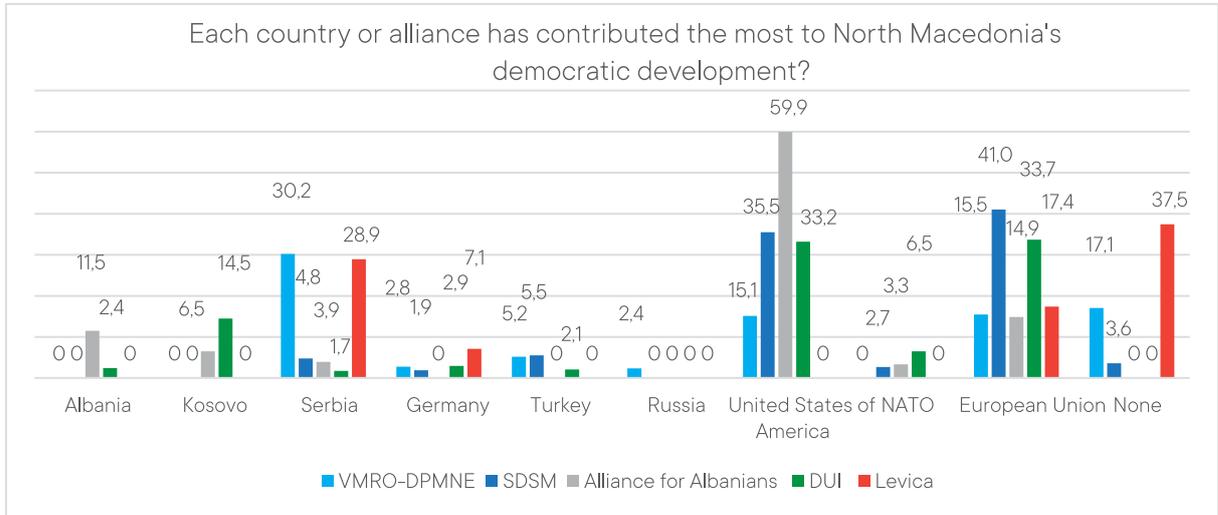


Figure 69: Greatest contribution in terms of democratic development, by political party preference

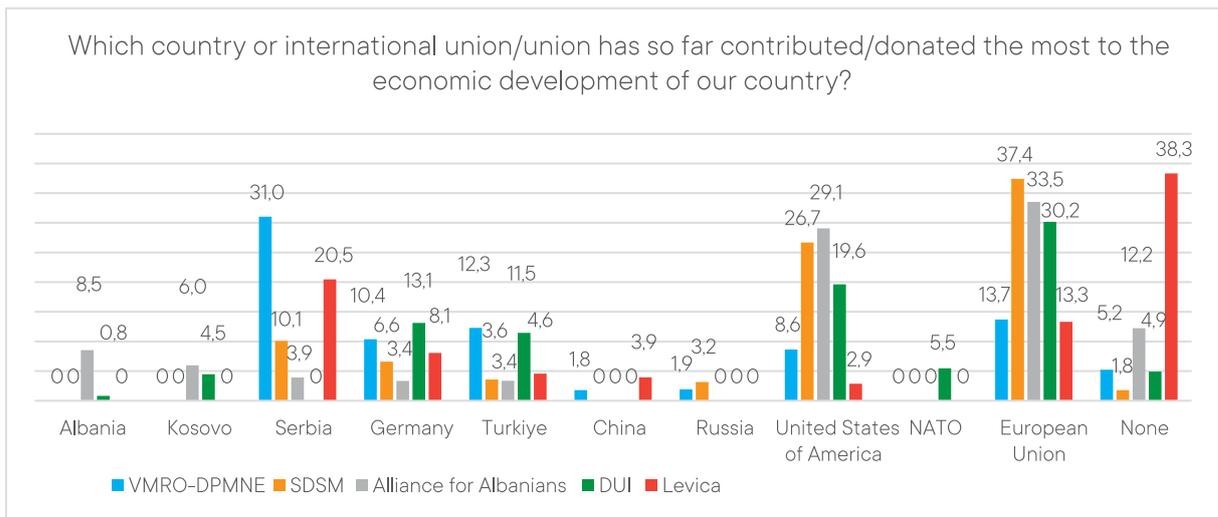


Figure 70: Greatest contribution in terms of economic development, by political party preference

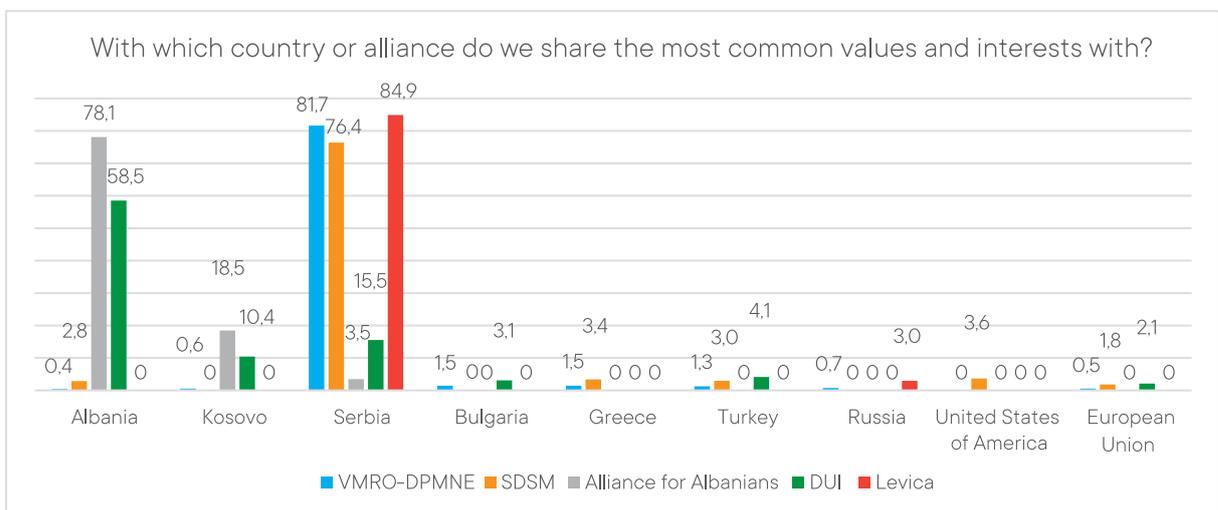


Figure 71: Most shared values and interests, by political party preference

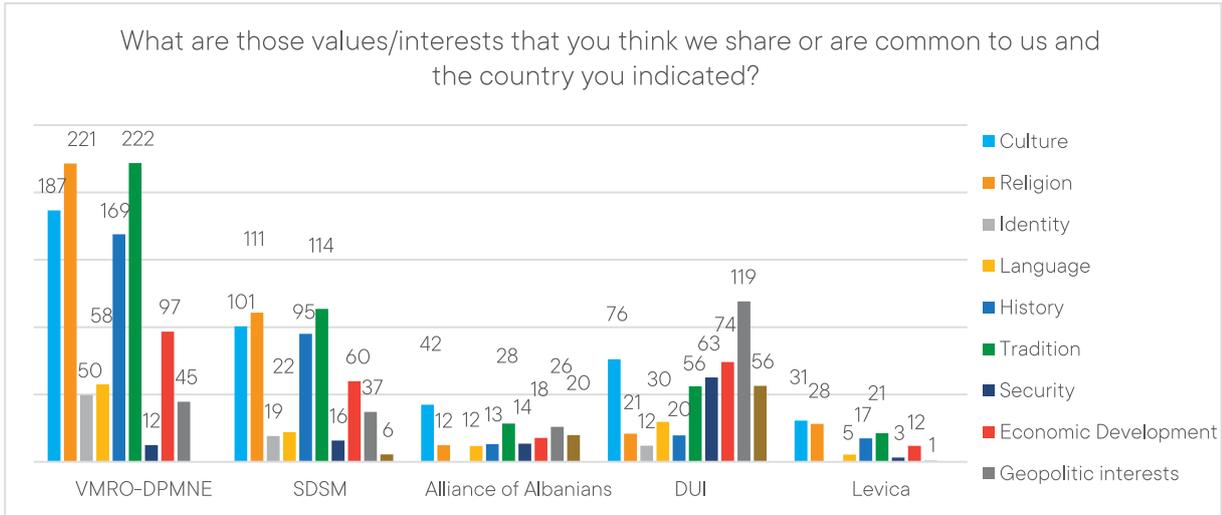


Figure 72: Most important shared values and interests

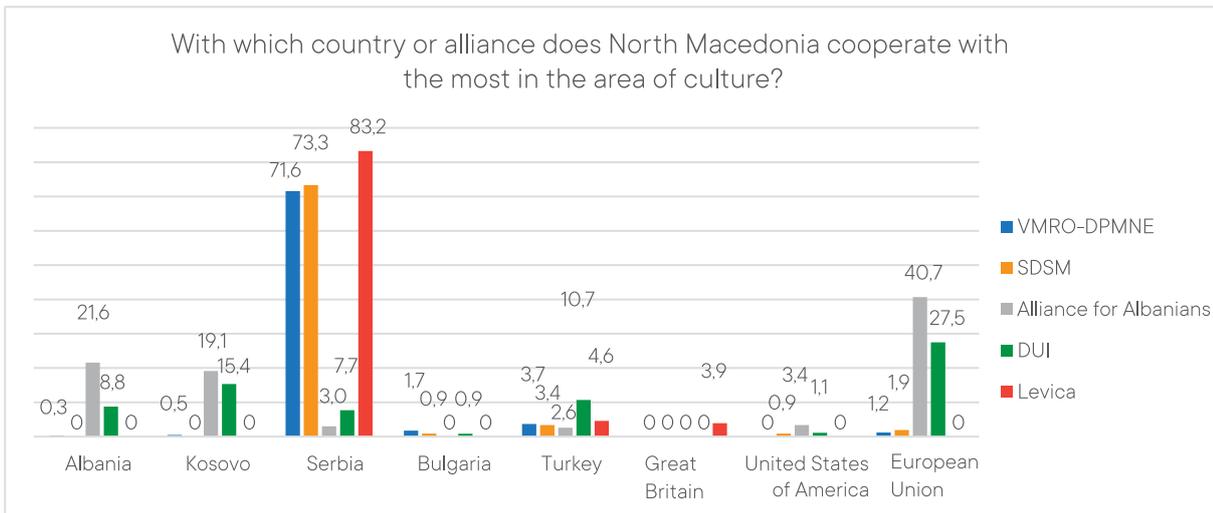


Figure 73: Greatest Cooperation in the Field of Culture, by Political Party Preference

Section 7: Overall – Relations with neighboring countries

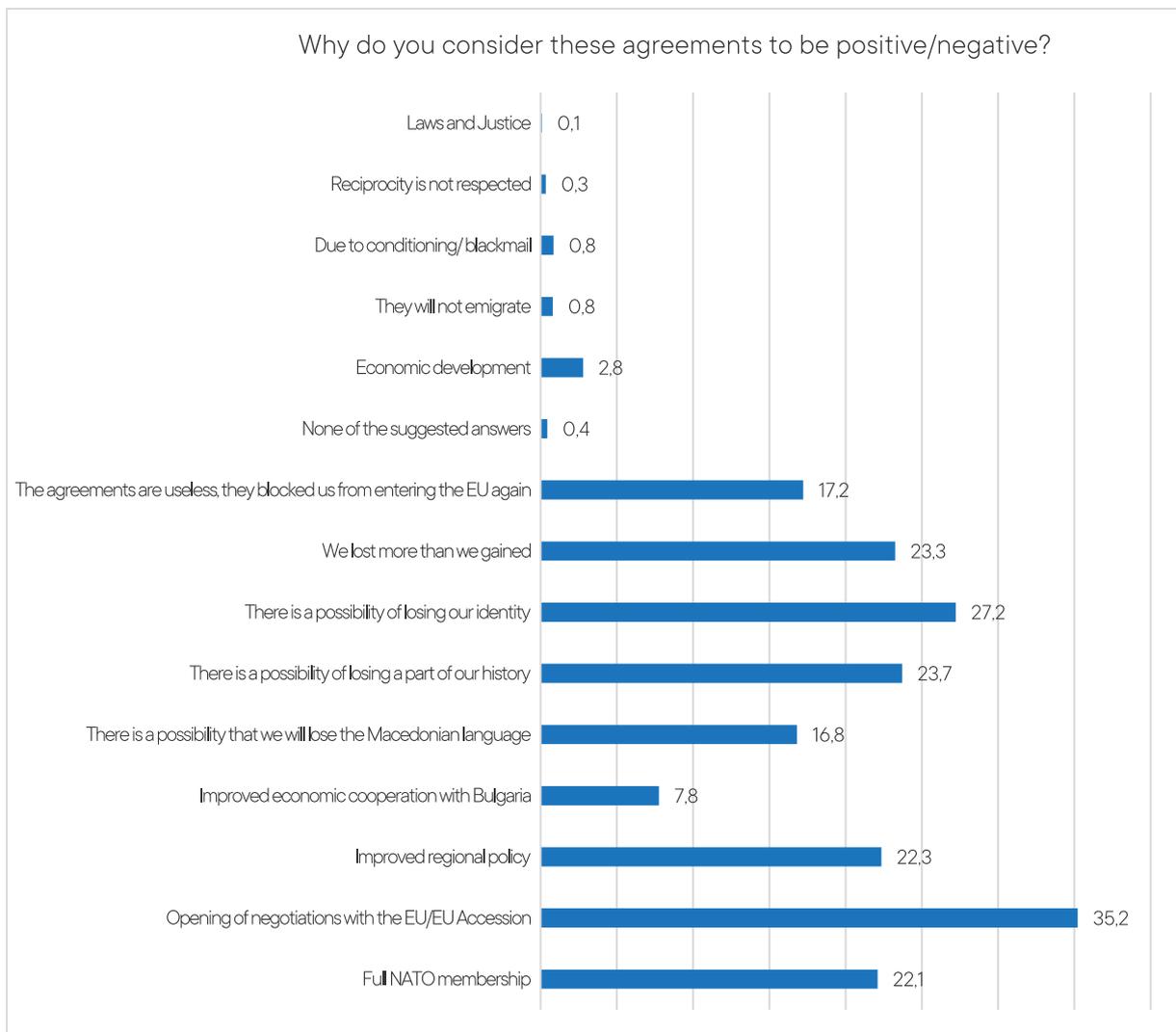


Figure 74: Reasons for supporting (or not) the Prespa Agreement and the Agreement with Bulgaria

Section 8: Age – Relations with neighbouring countries

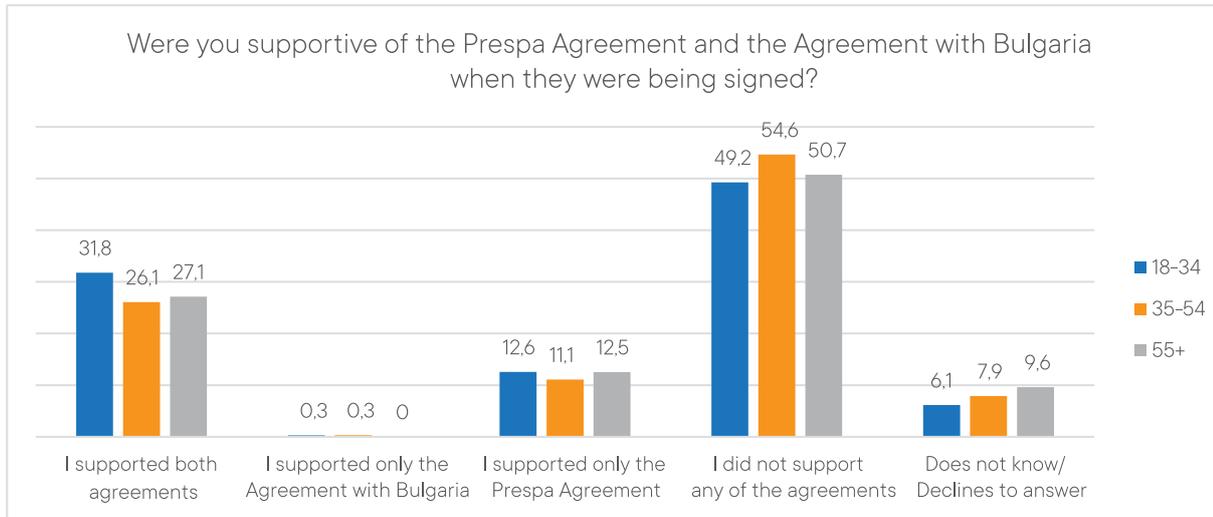


Figure 75: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria in the past, by age groups

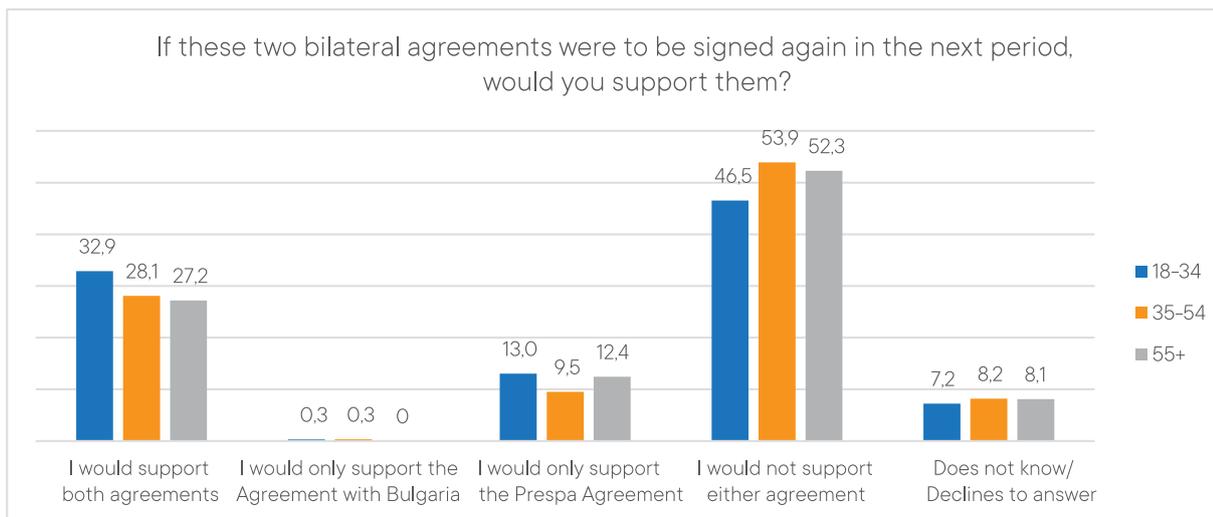


Figure 76: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria now, by age groups

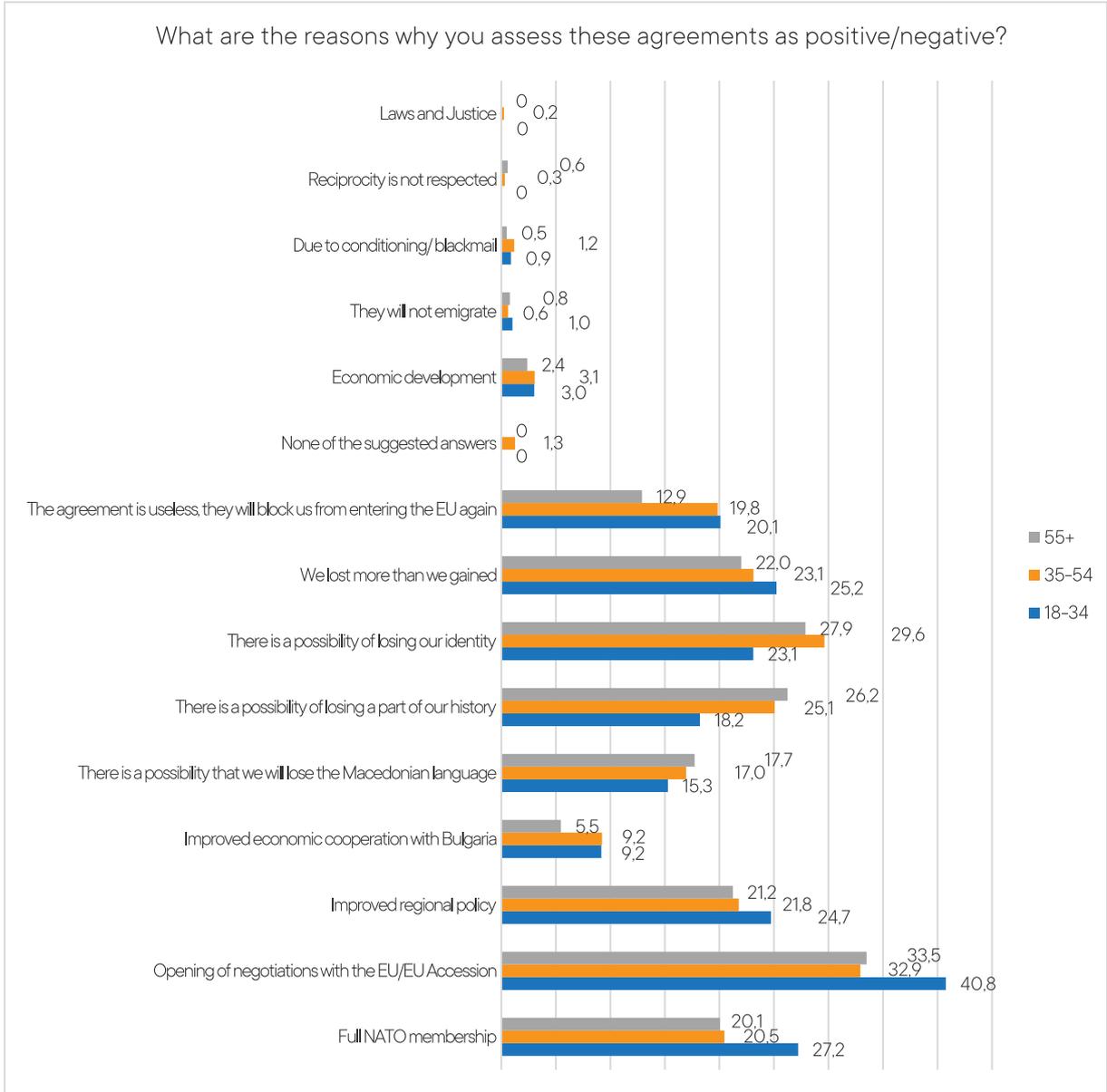


Figure 77: Reasons for assessing the two agreements as positive/negative, by age groups

Section 9: Ethnicity – Relations with neighbouring countries

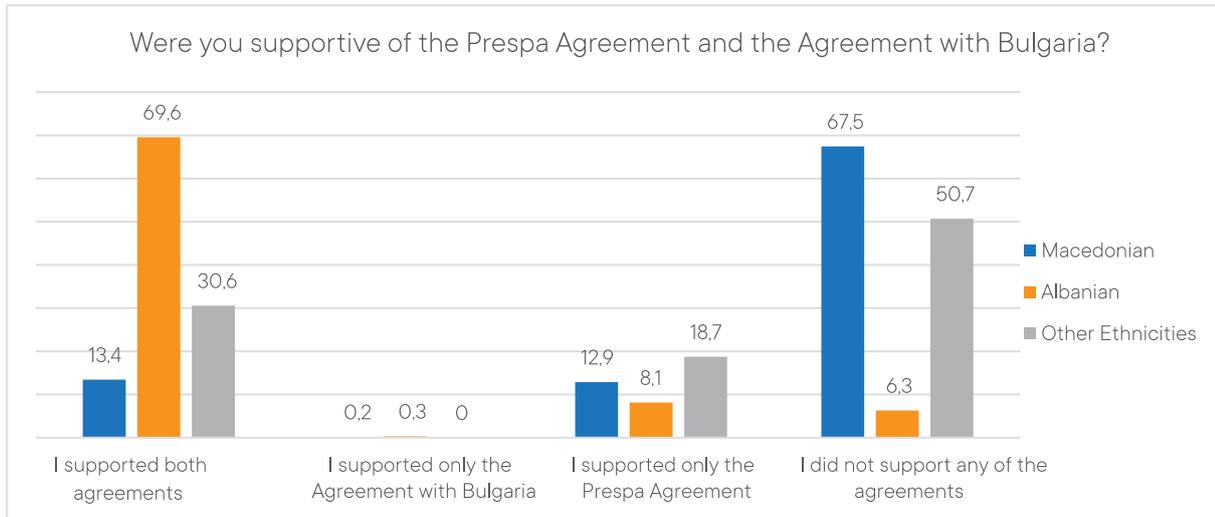


Figure 78: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria in the past, by ethnicity

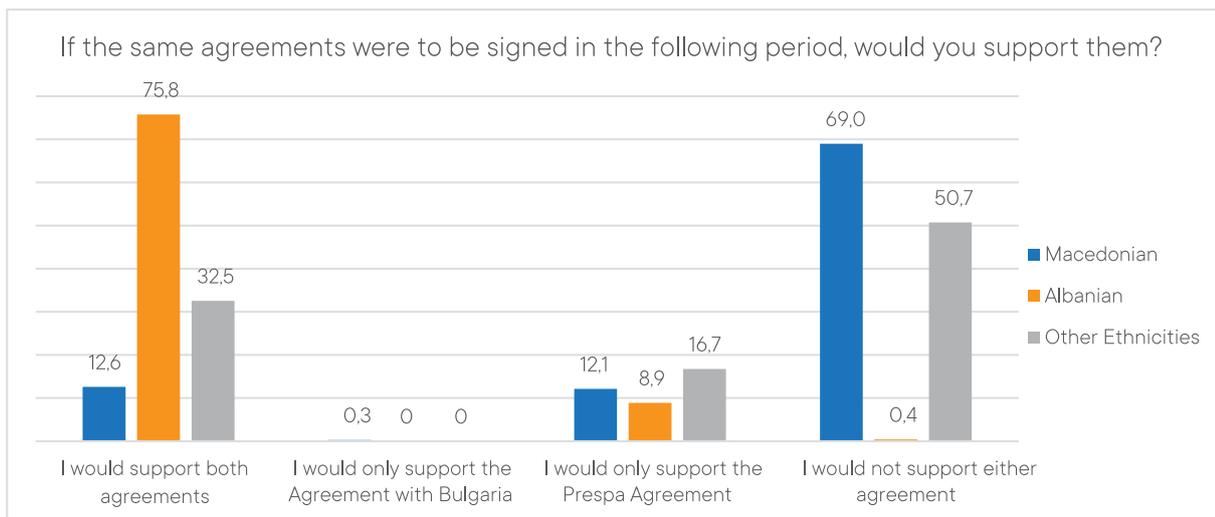


Figure 79: Support for Prespa and the agreement with Bulgaria now, by ethnicity

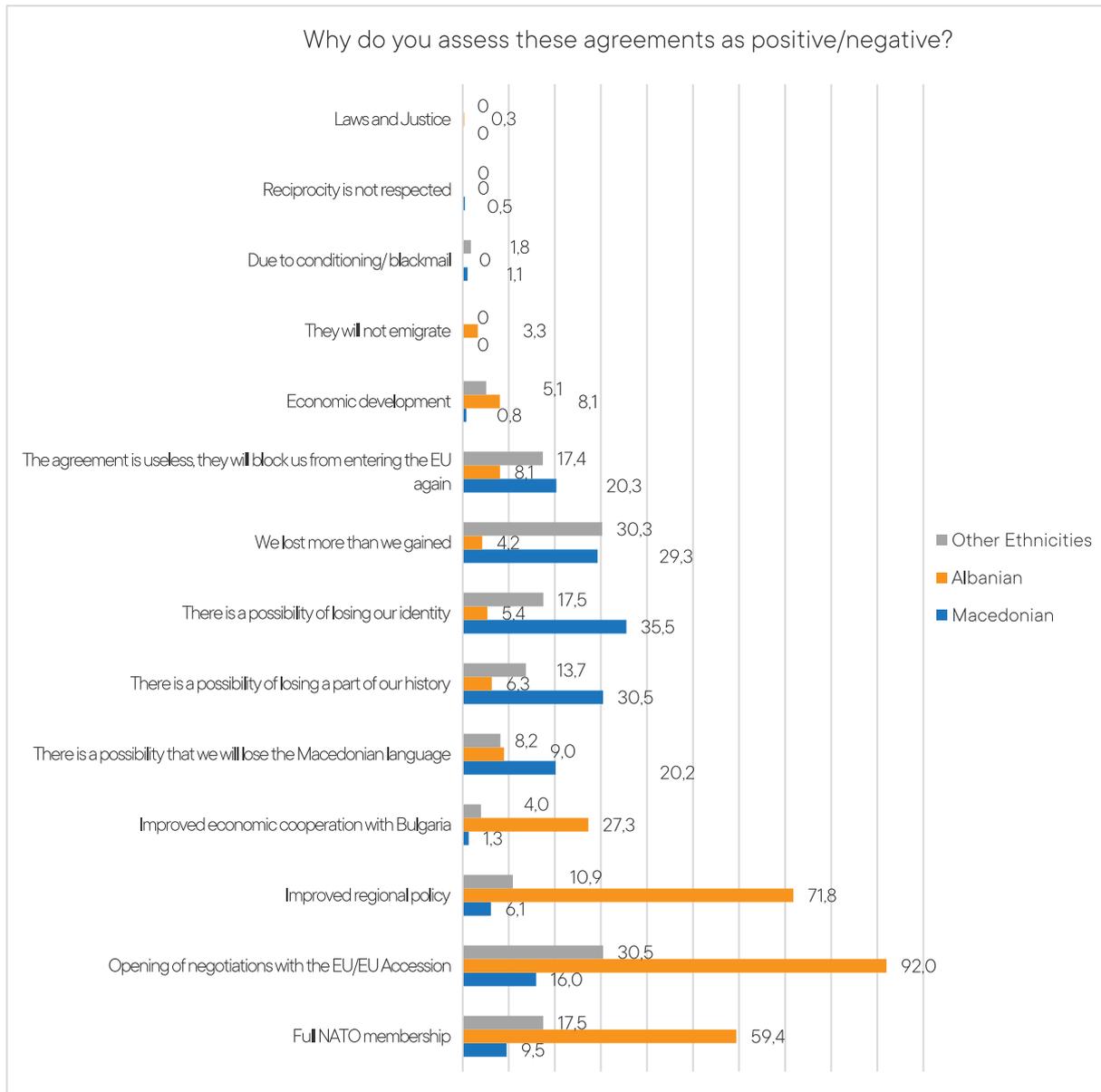


Figure 80: Reasons for assessing the two agreements as positive/negative, by ethnicity

Section 10: Political Party Preference – Relations with neighbouring countries

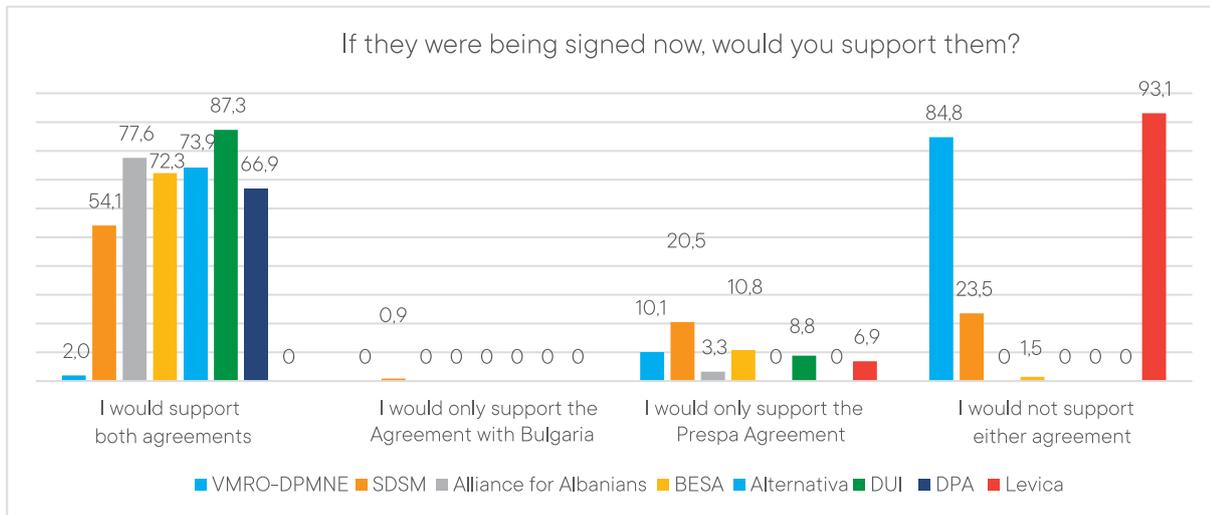


Figure 81: Support for the two bilateral agreements if they were being signed now, by Political Party Preference

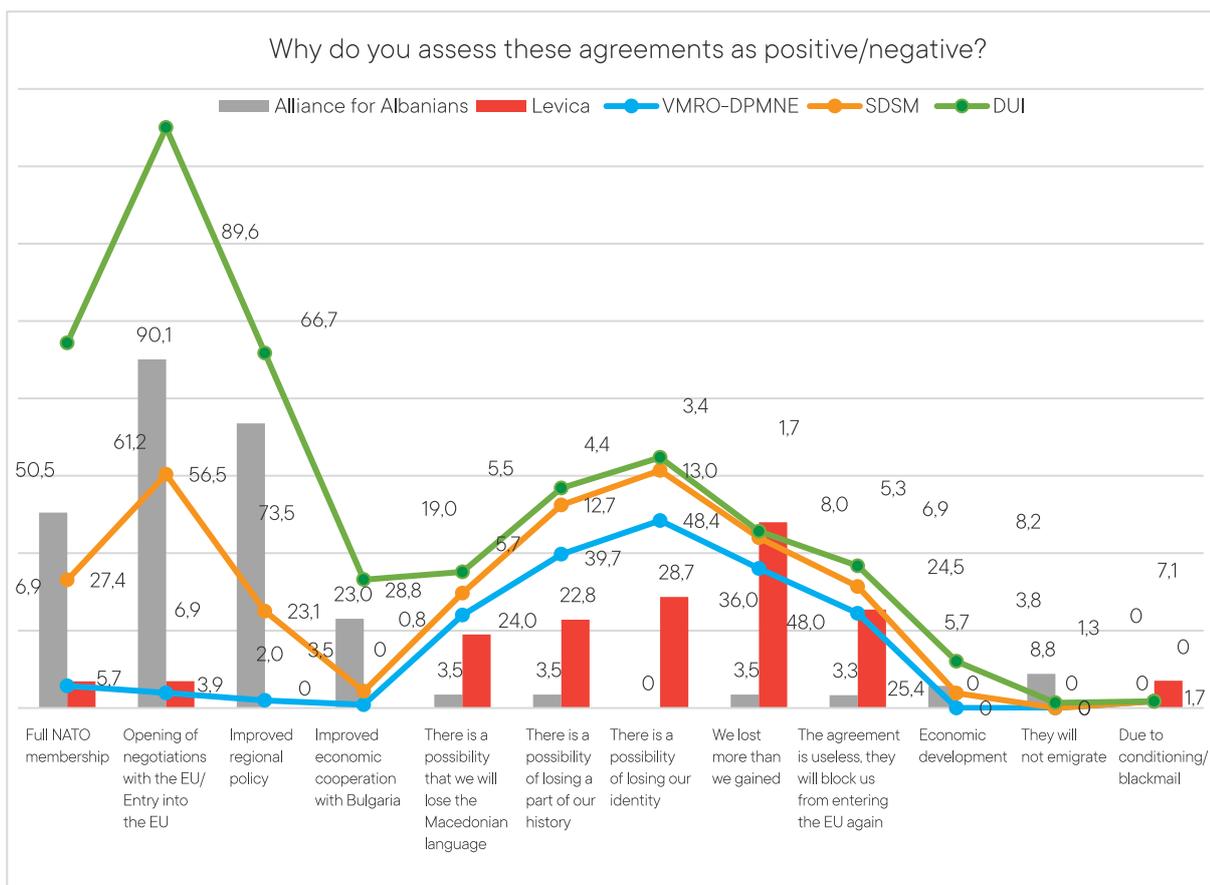


Figure 82: Reasons for assessing the two bilateral agreements as positive/negative, by Political Party Preference

Section 11: Overall – EU Membership

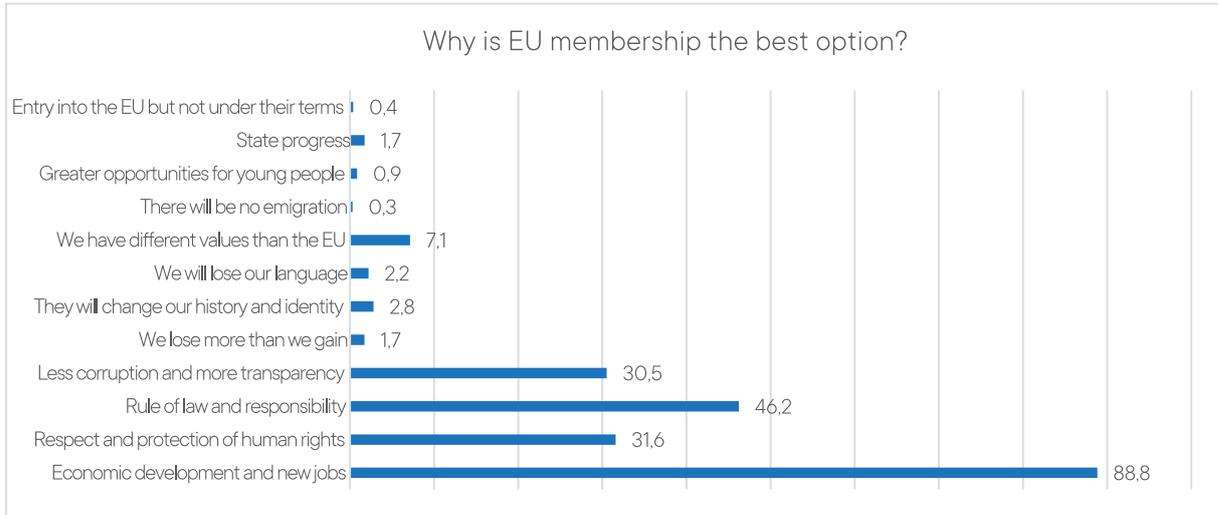


Figure 83: Reasons for why EU membership is the best option

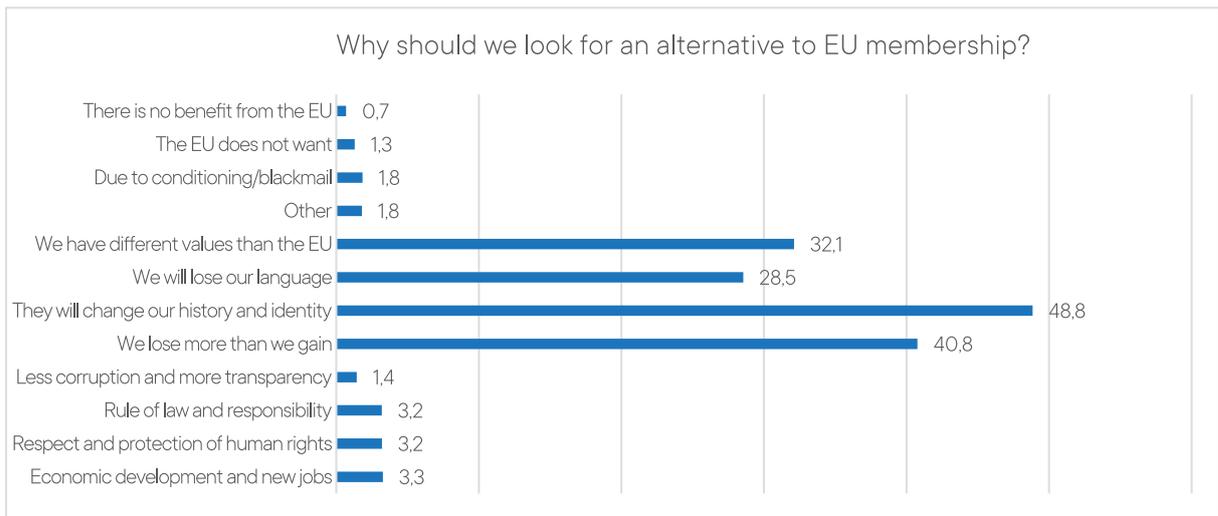


Figure 84: Reasons to look for an alternative for EU membership

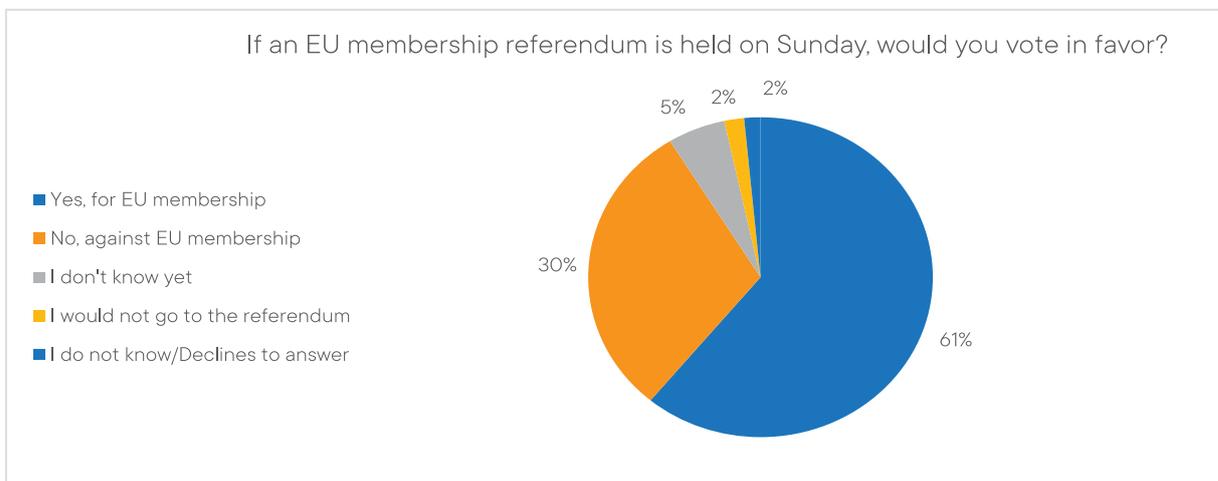


Figure 85: Support for EU membership referendum

Section 12: Gender – EU Membership

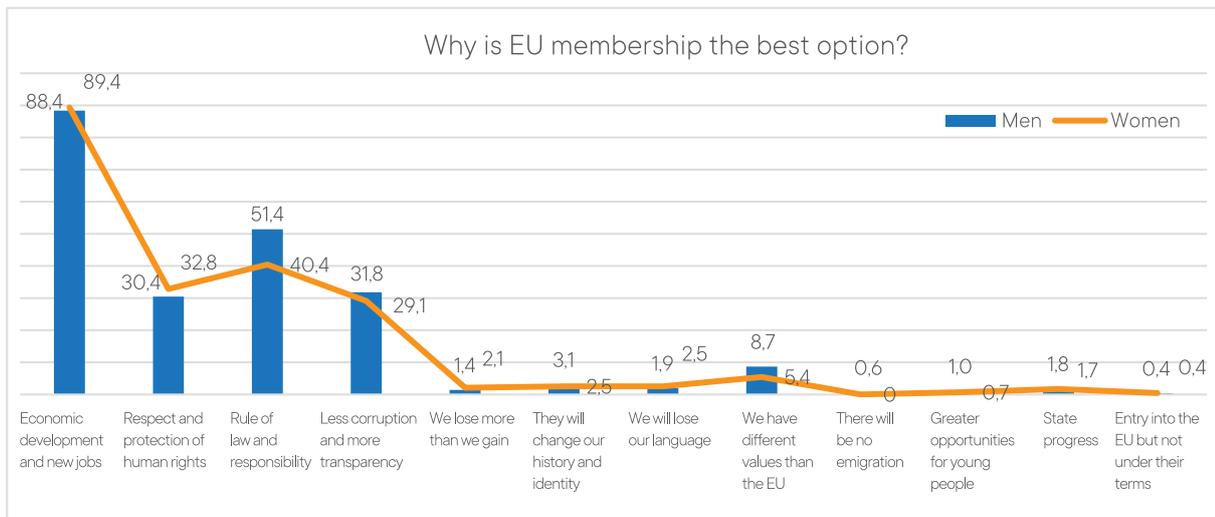


Figure 86: Reasons for why EU membership is the best option, by gender

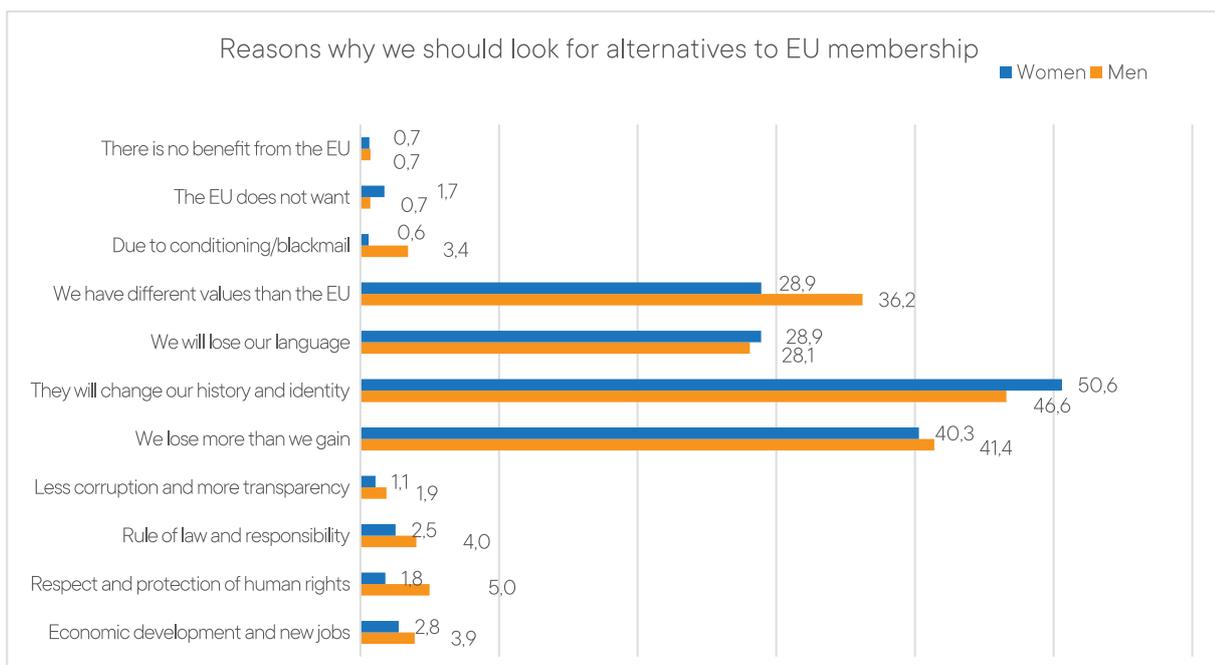


Figure 87: Reasons why we should look for alternatives to EU membership, by gender

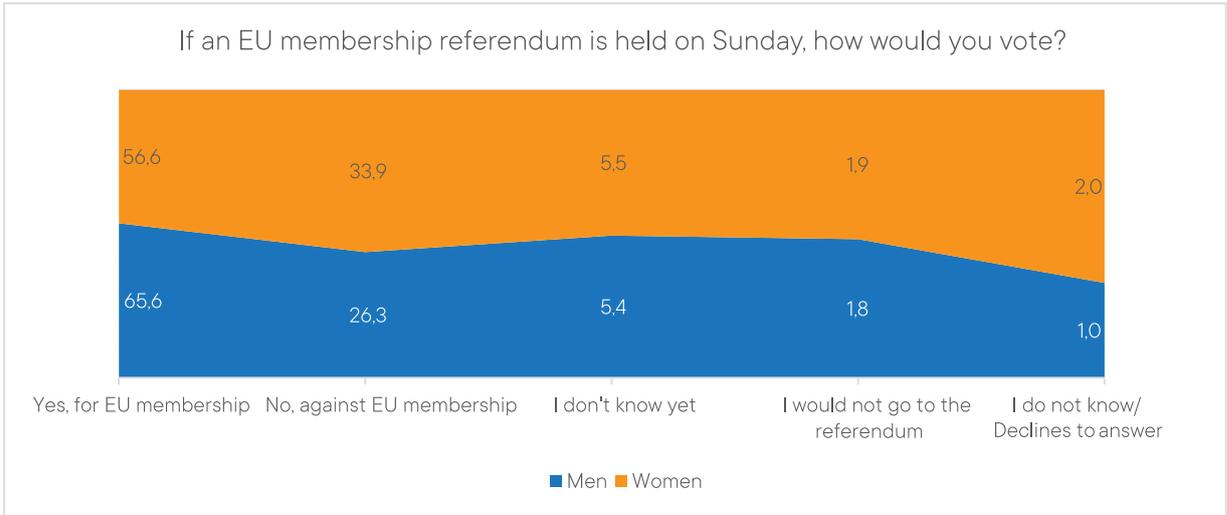


Figure 88: Support for an EU membership referendum, by gender

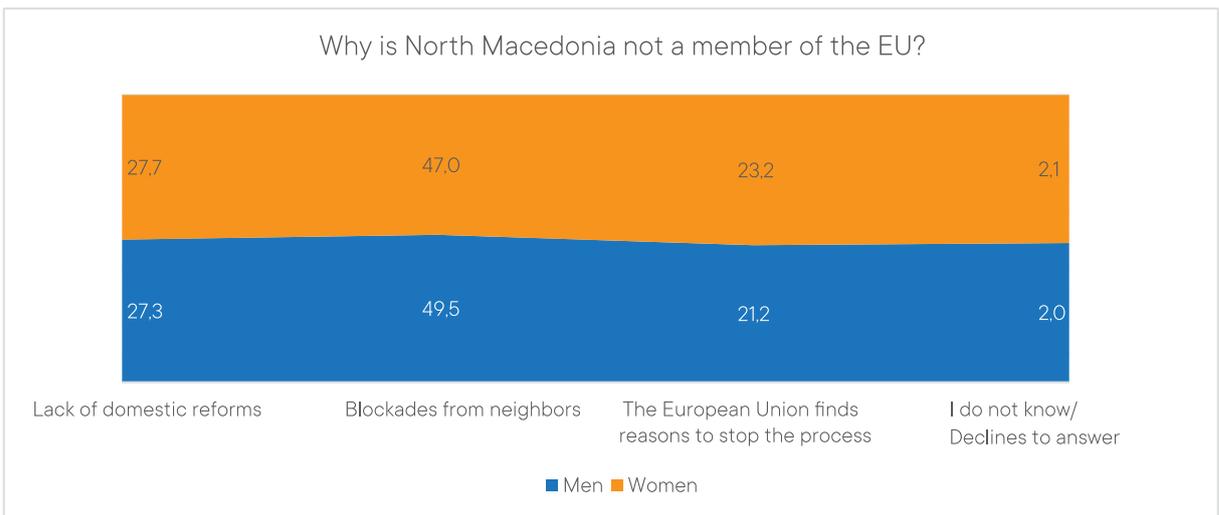


Figure 89: Reasons for why North Macedonia is not a member of the EU, by gender

Section 13: Age – EU Membership

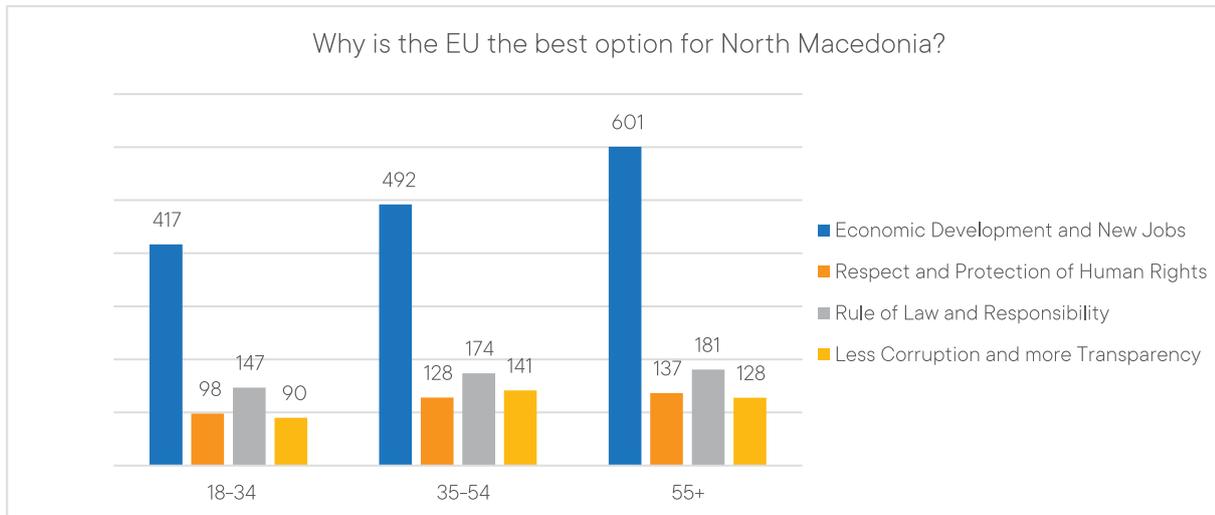


Figure 90: Reasons why the EU is the best option, by age group

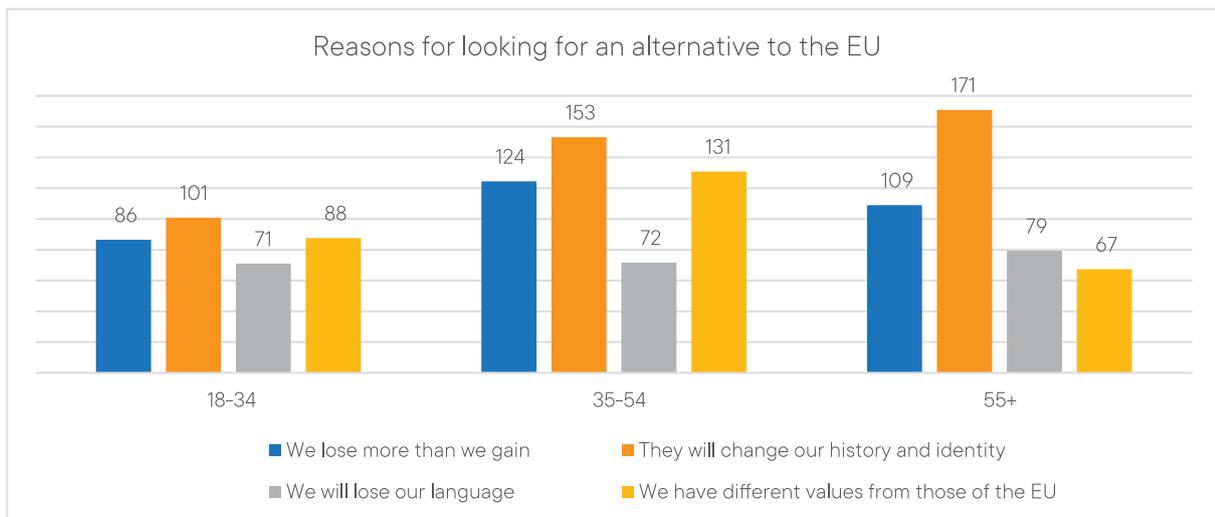


Figure 91: Reasons why the EU is the best option, by age group

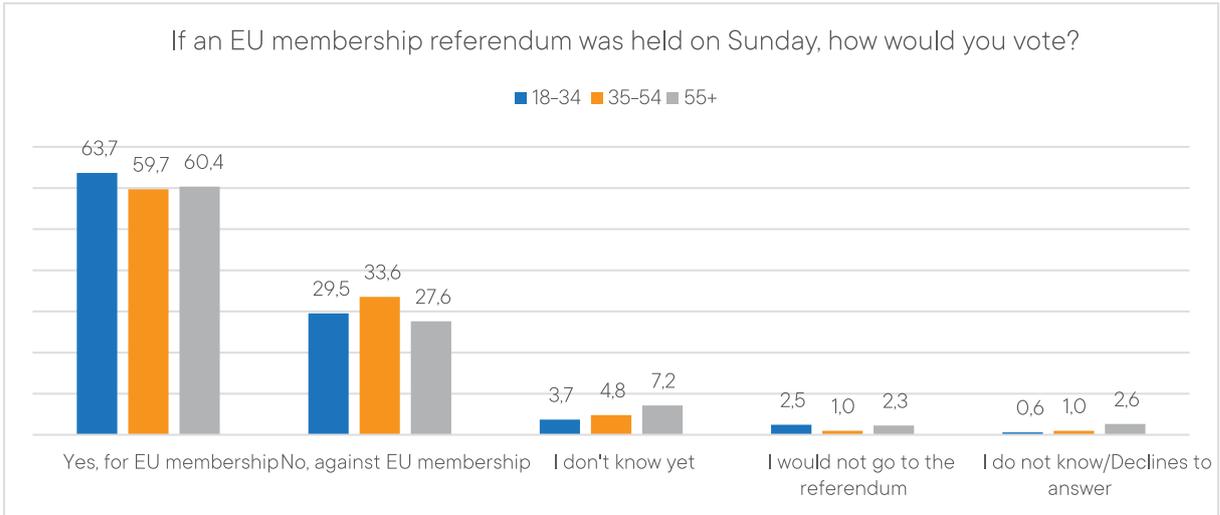


Figure 92: If an EU membership referendum is held on Sunday, how would you vote, by age groups

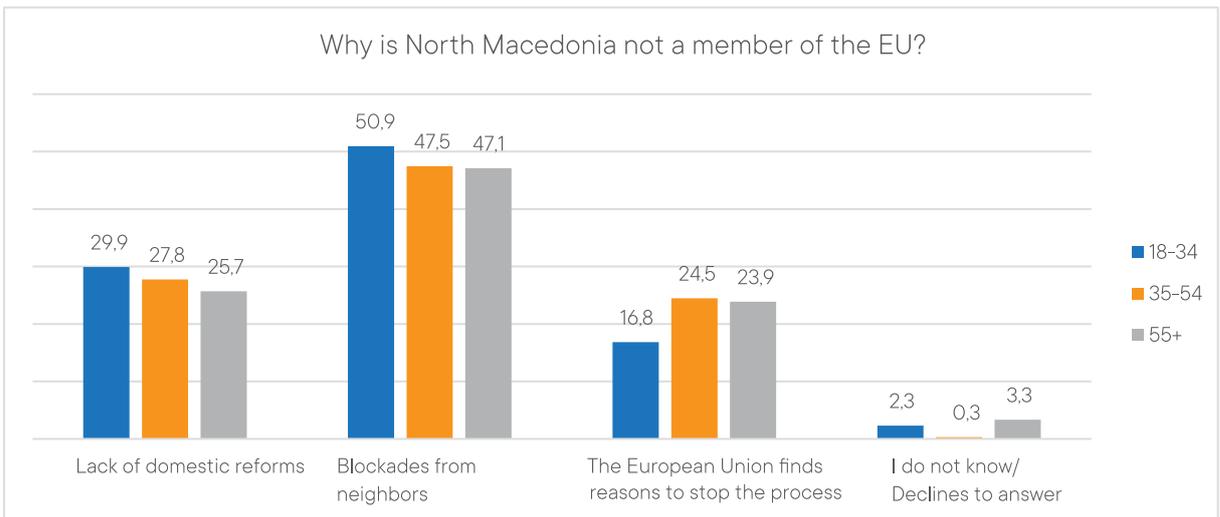


Figure 93: Reasons for why North Macedonia is not a member of the EU

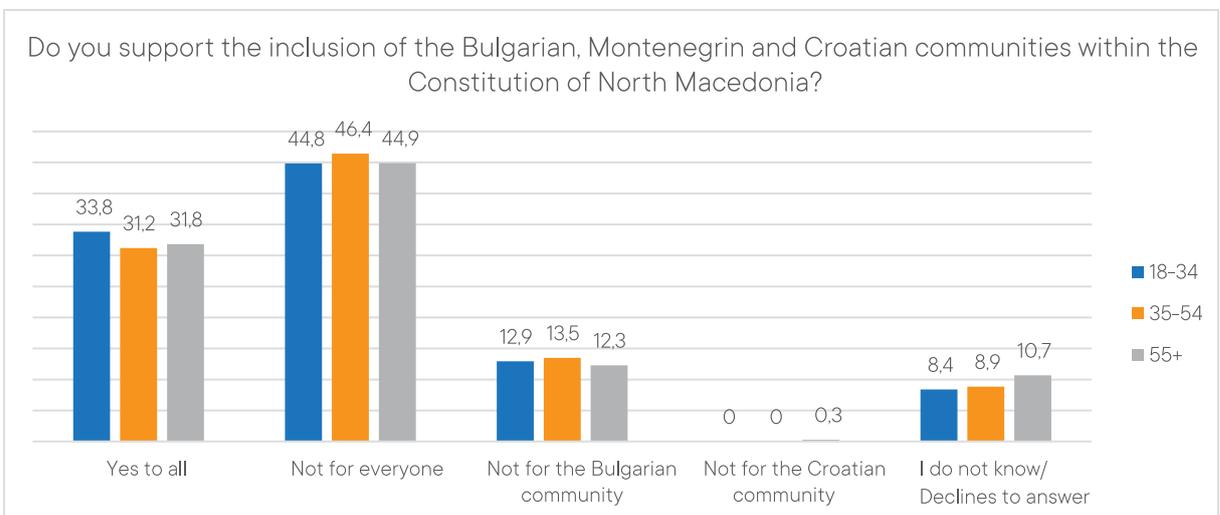


Figure 94: Support for the constitutional amendments, by age group

Section 14: Ethnicity – EU Membership

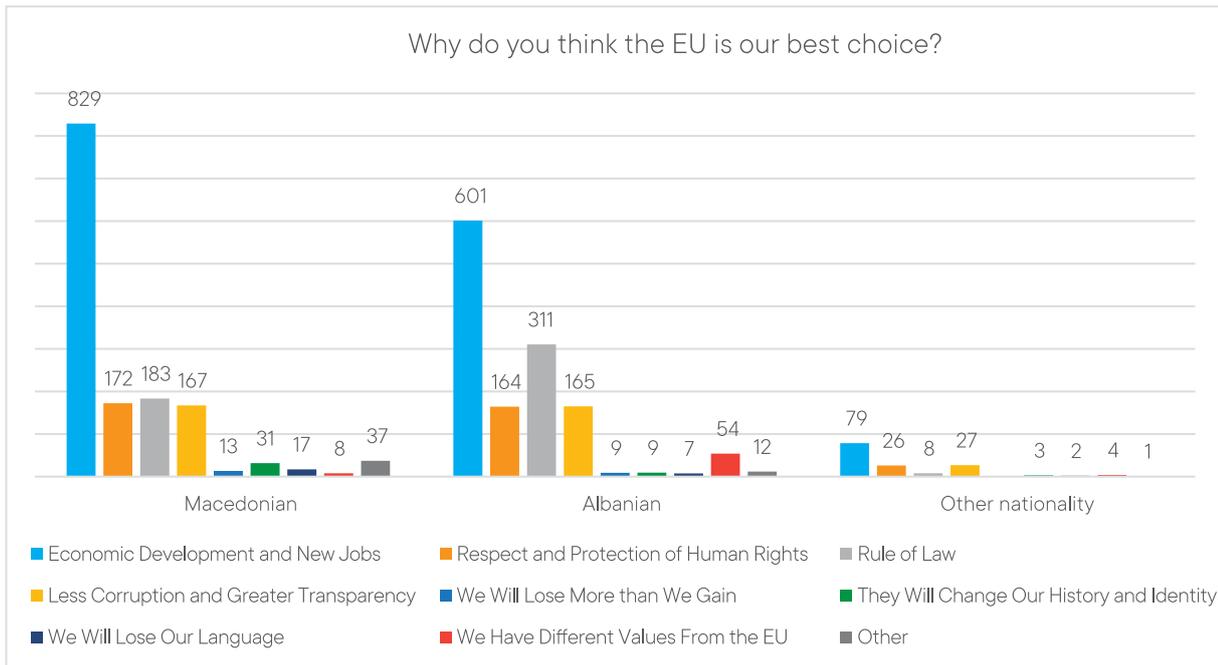


Figure 95: If the EU is our best choice, why is it so? By ethnicity

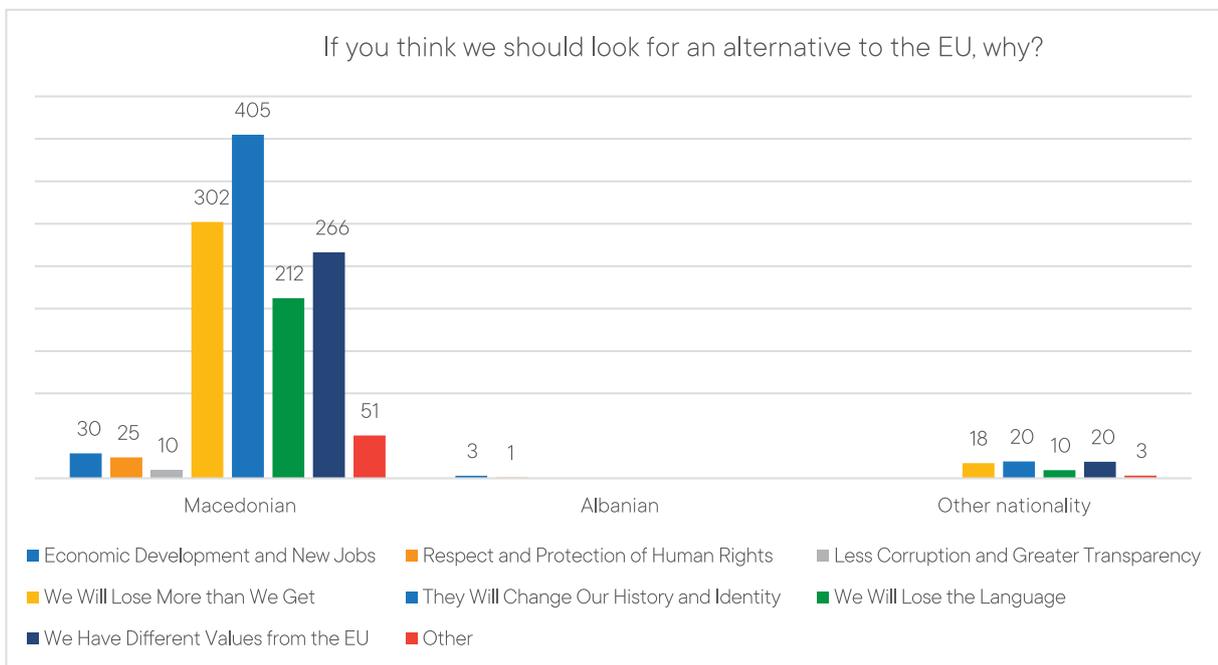


Figure 96: If we need an alternative to the EU, why is it so? By ethnicity

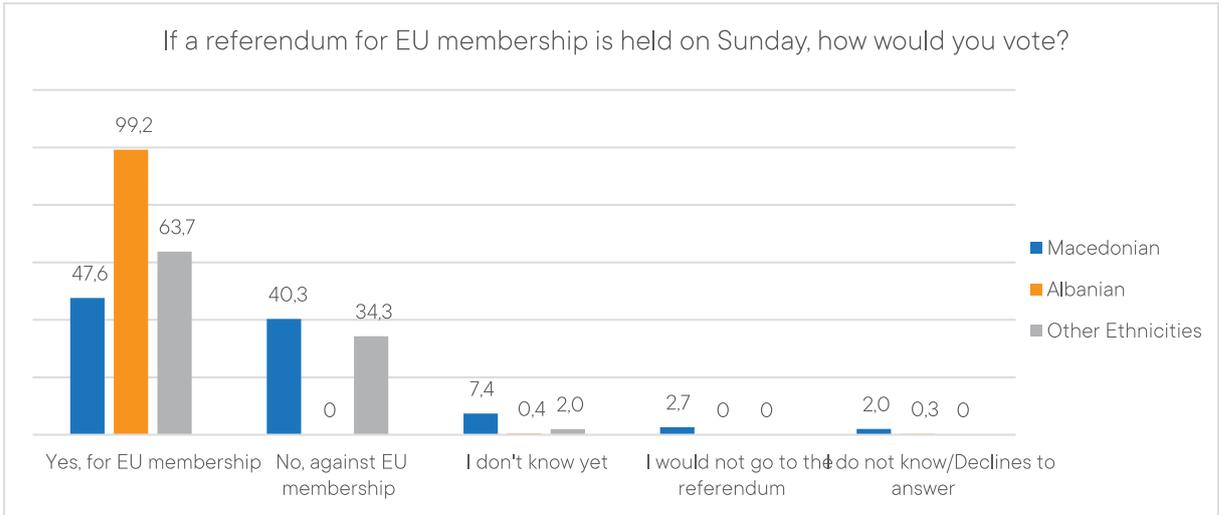


Figure 97: If a referendum was held, how would you vote? By ethnicity

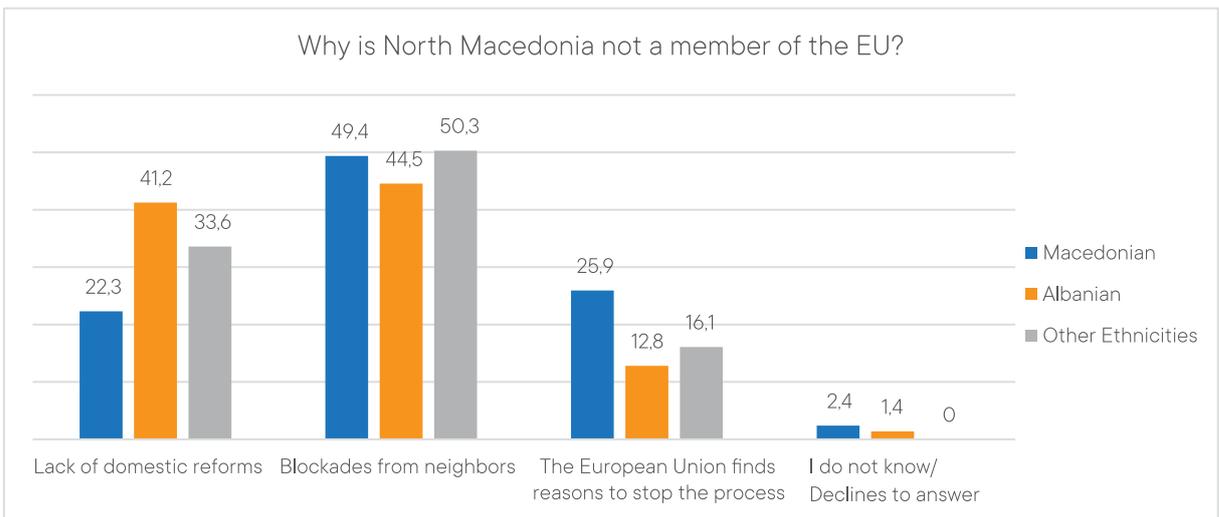


Figure 98: Reasons for North Macedonia not being a member of the EU, by ethnicity

Section 15: Political Party Preference – EU Membership

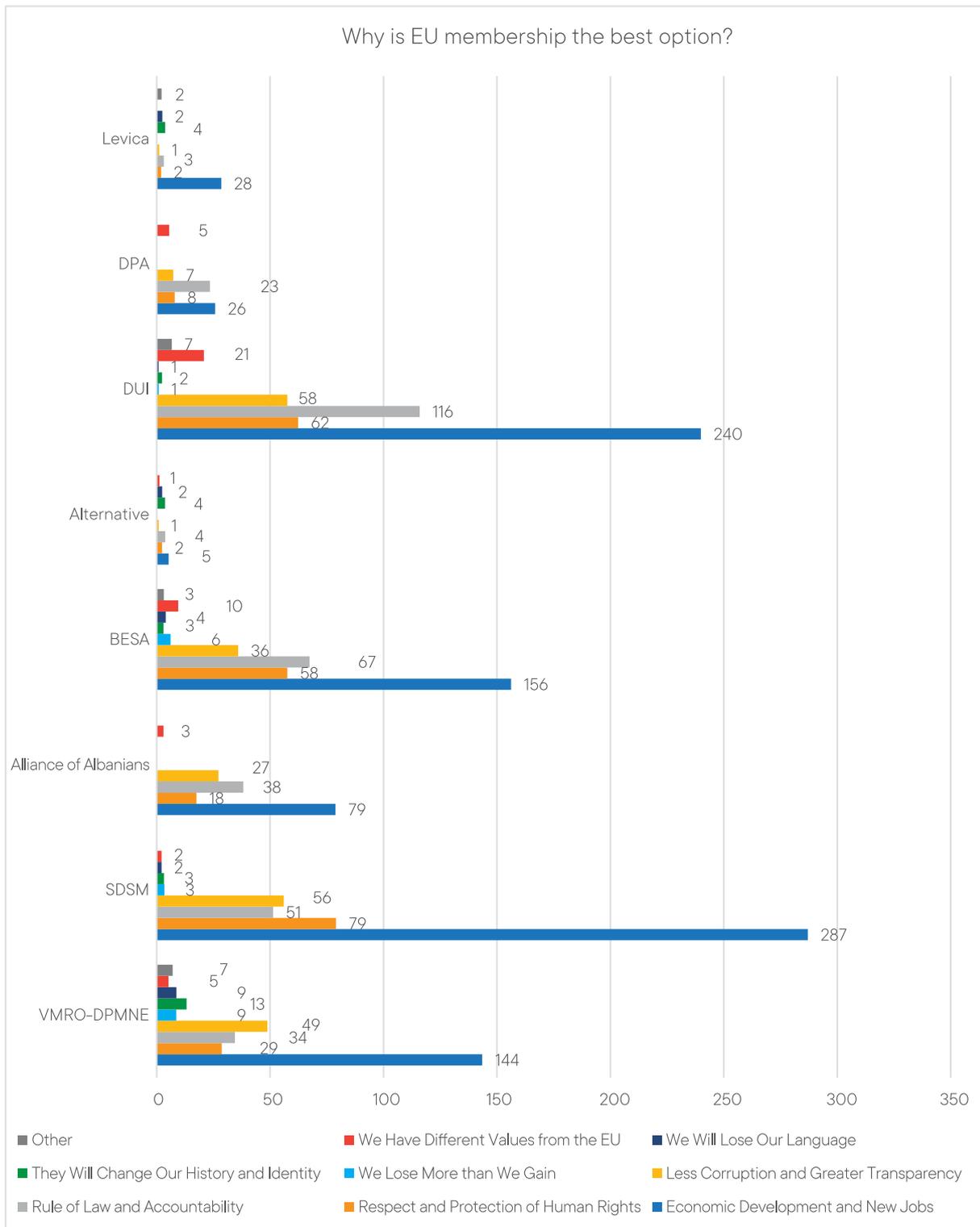


Figure 99: Reasons for why EU membership is our best option, by Political Party Preference

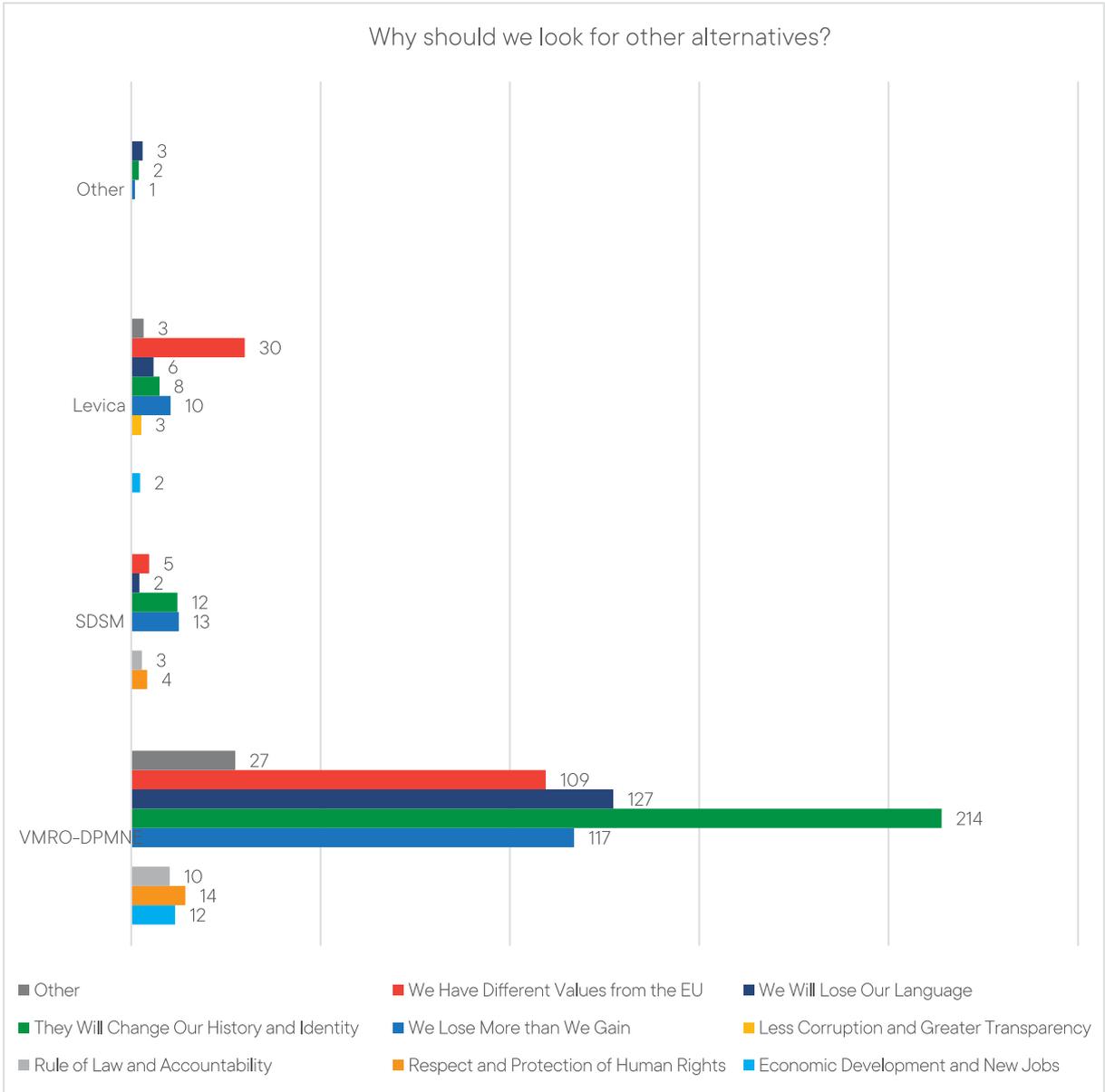


Figure 100: Reasons for why we need to look for an alternative to EU membership, by Political Party Preference

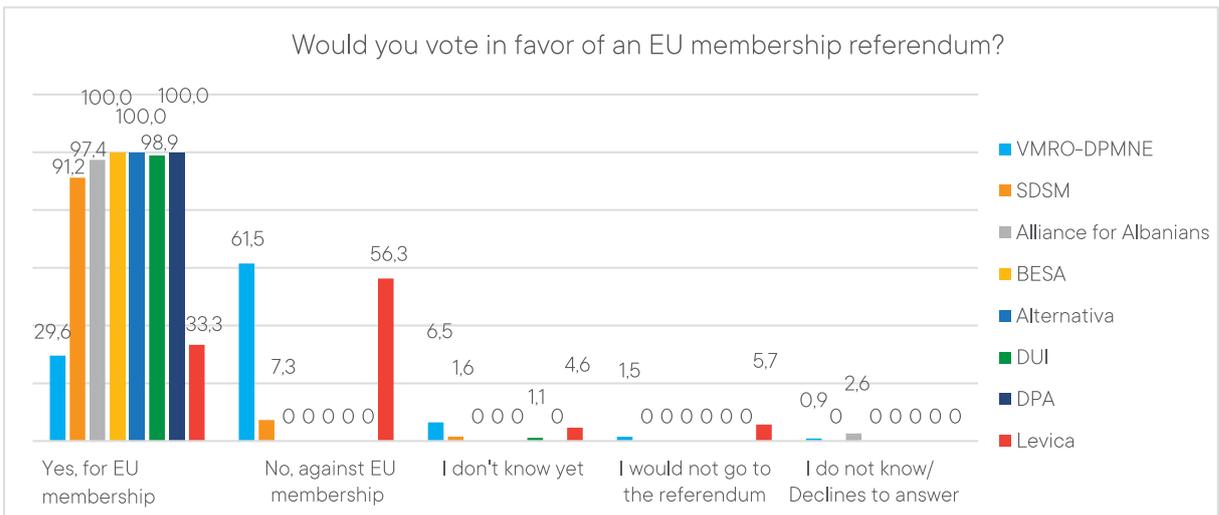


Figure 101: Support for an EU membership referendum, by Political Party Preference

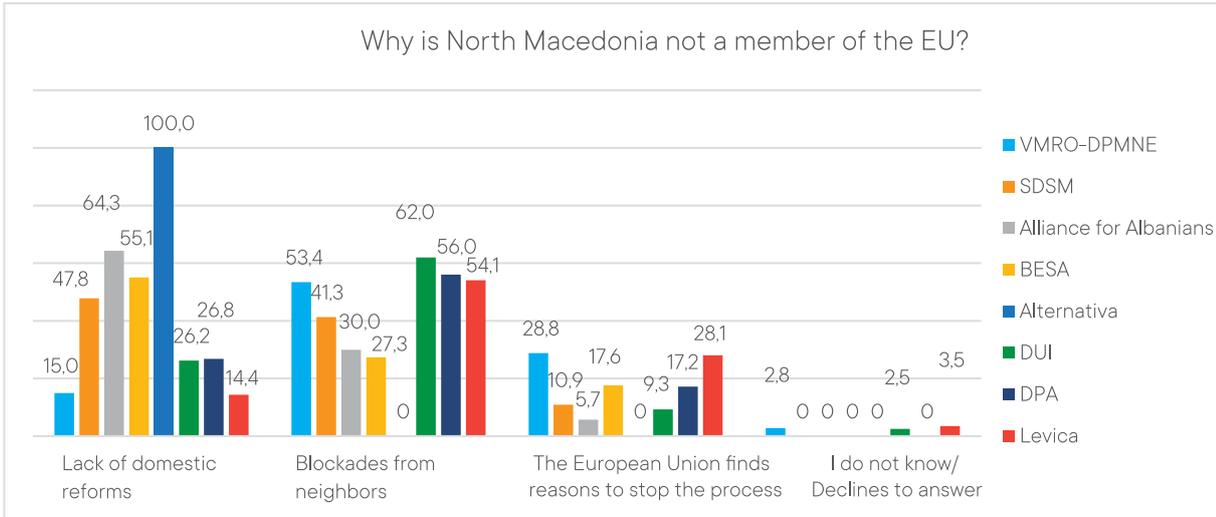


Figure 102: Reasons for North Macedonia not being a part of the EU, by Political Party Preference

Section 16: Overall – Media Consumption

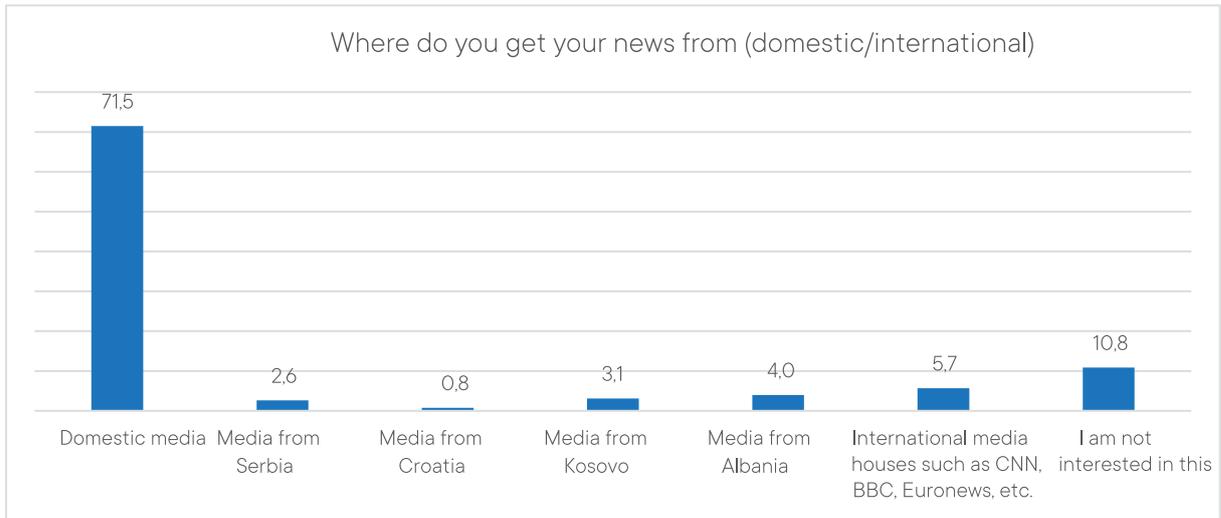


Figure 103: Source of information (domestic/international)

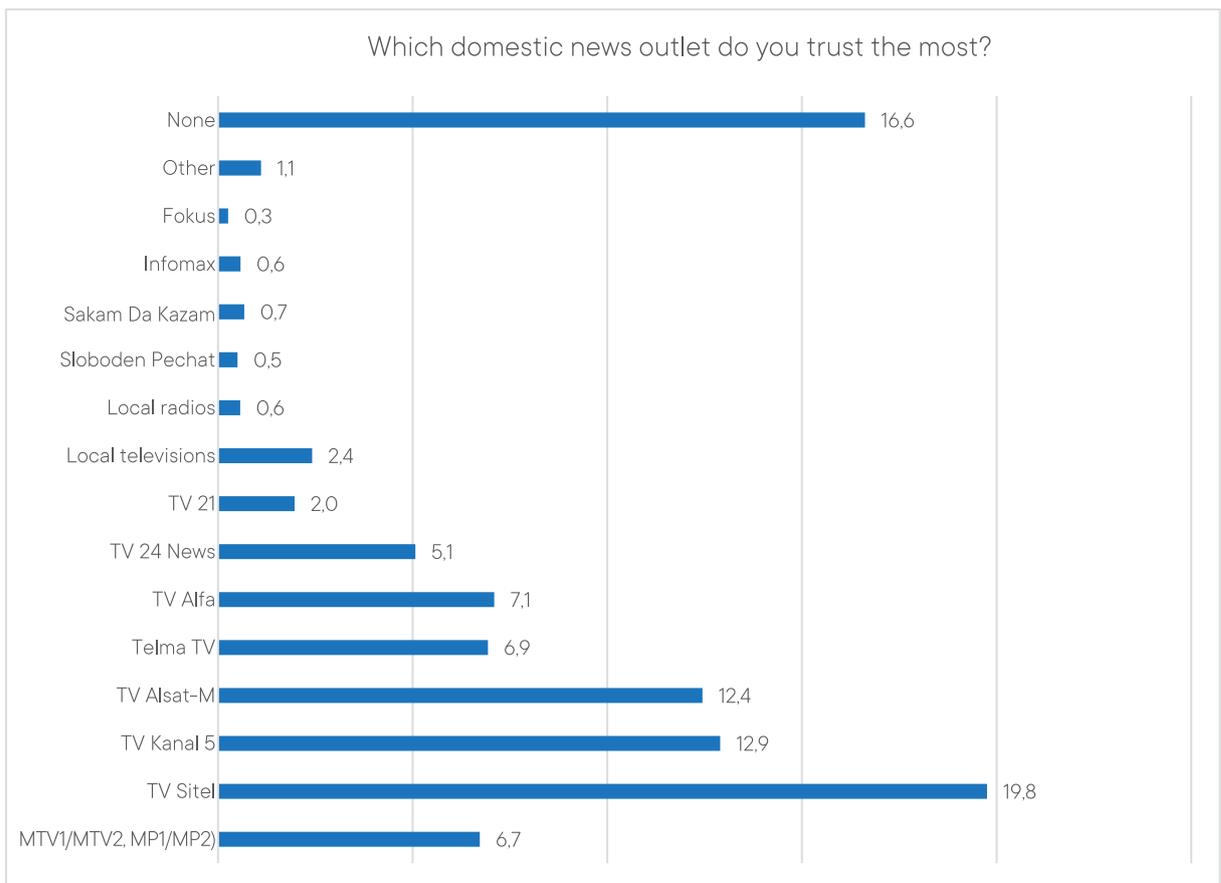


Figure 104: Trust in domestic news outlets

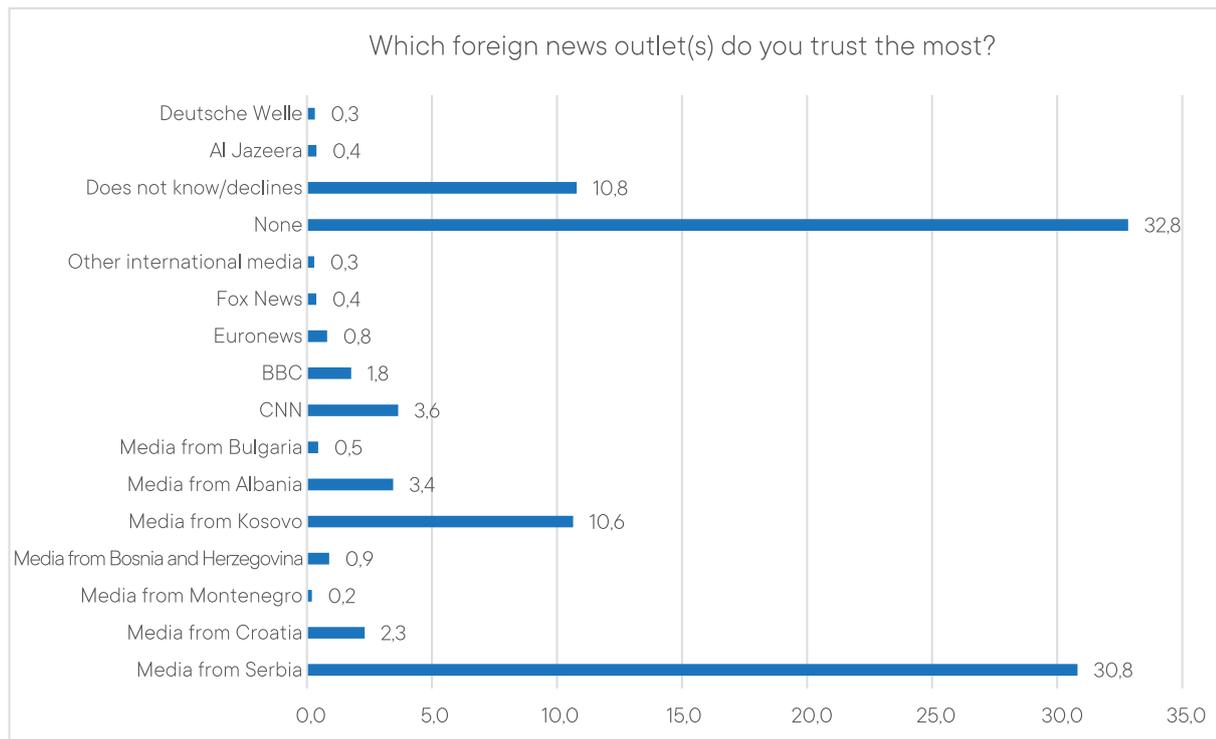


Figure 105: Trust in foreign news outlets

Section 17: Gender – Media Consumption

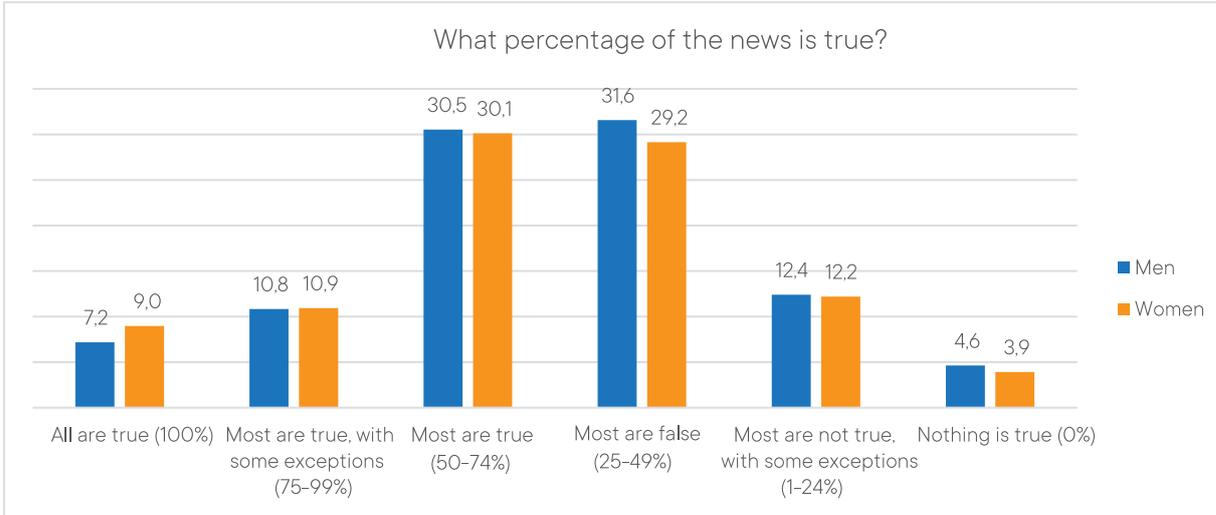


Figure 106: Percentage of the news that is true, by gender

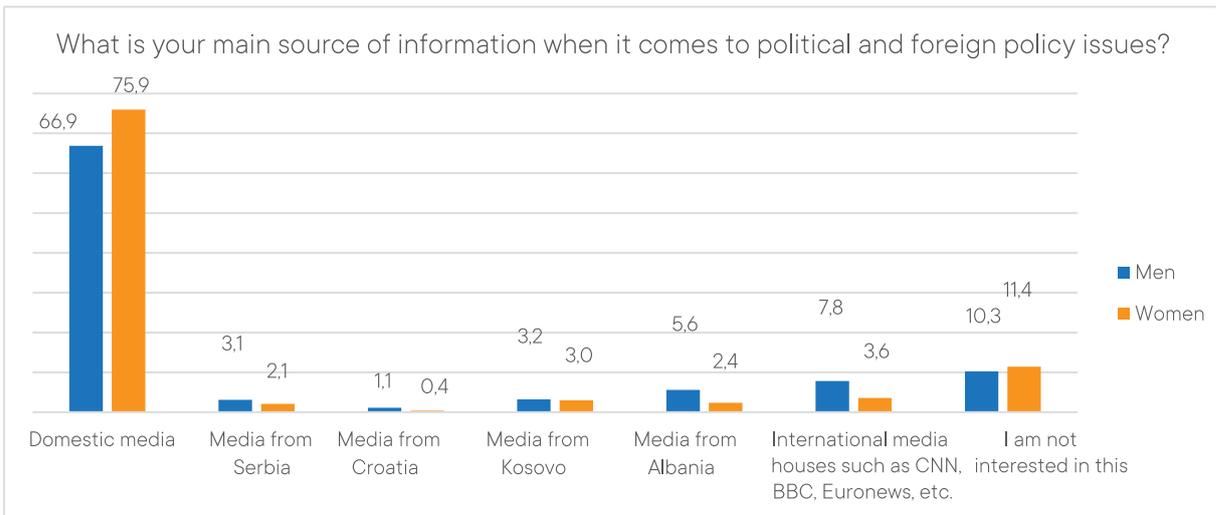


Figure 107: Source of information (domestic/international)

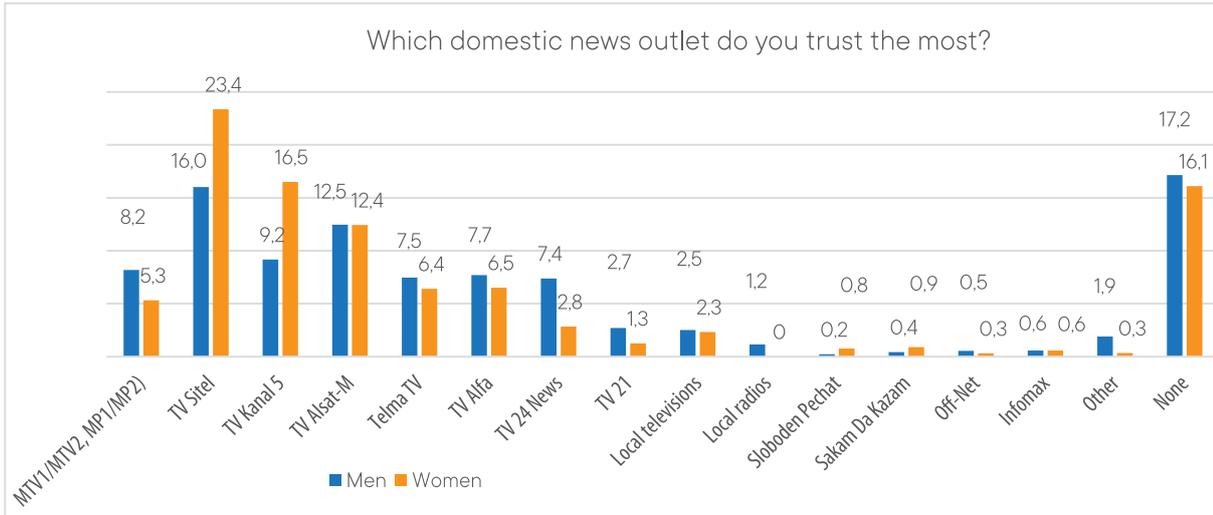


Figure 108: Trustworthiness of domestic news outlets, by gender

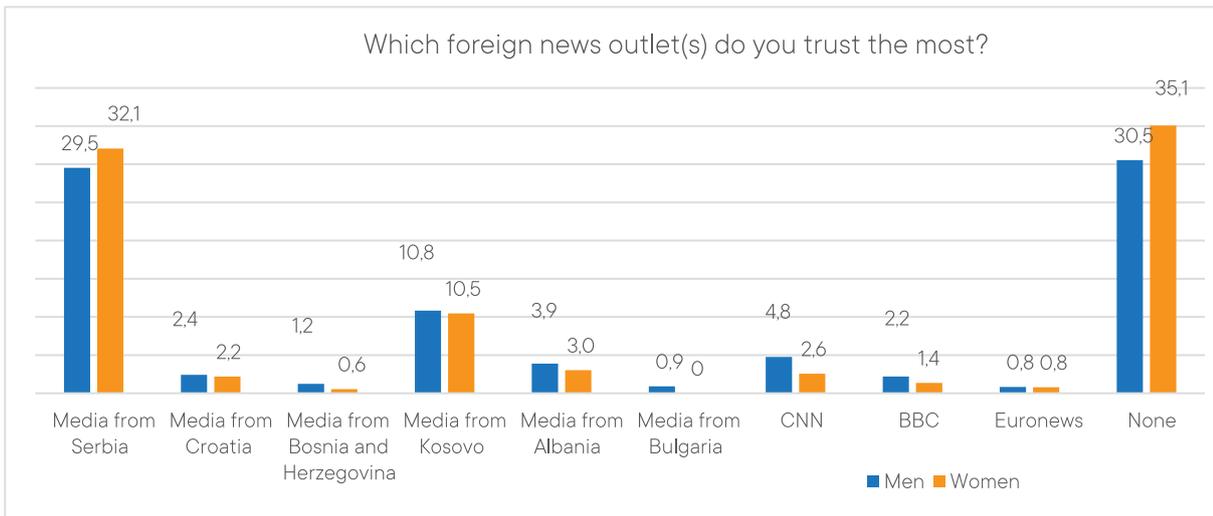


Figure 109: Trustworthiness of foreign news outlets, by gender

Section 18: Age – Media Consumption

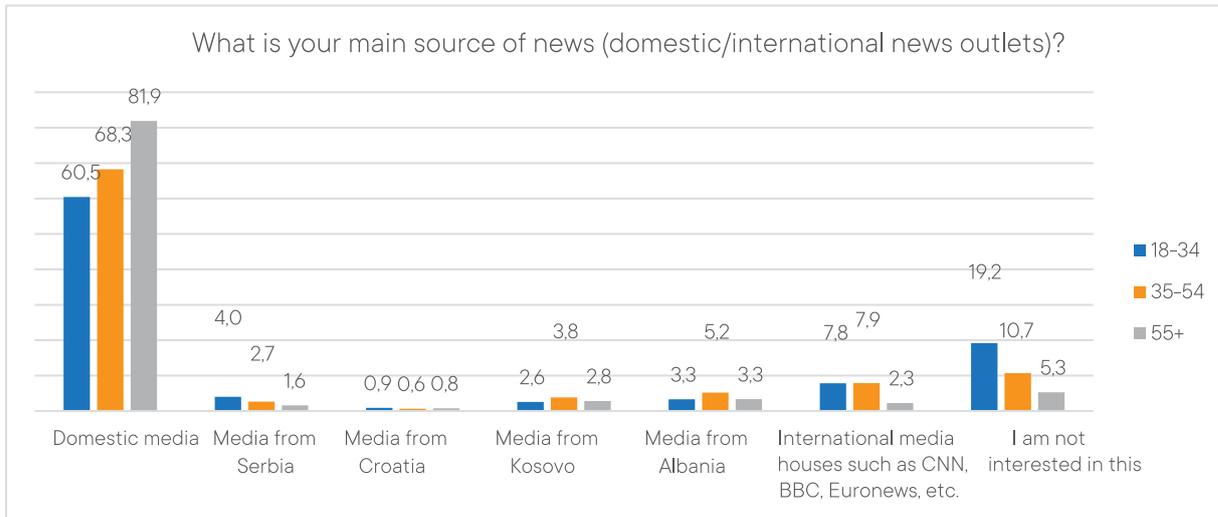


Figure 110: Source of information, by age groups

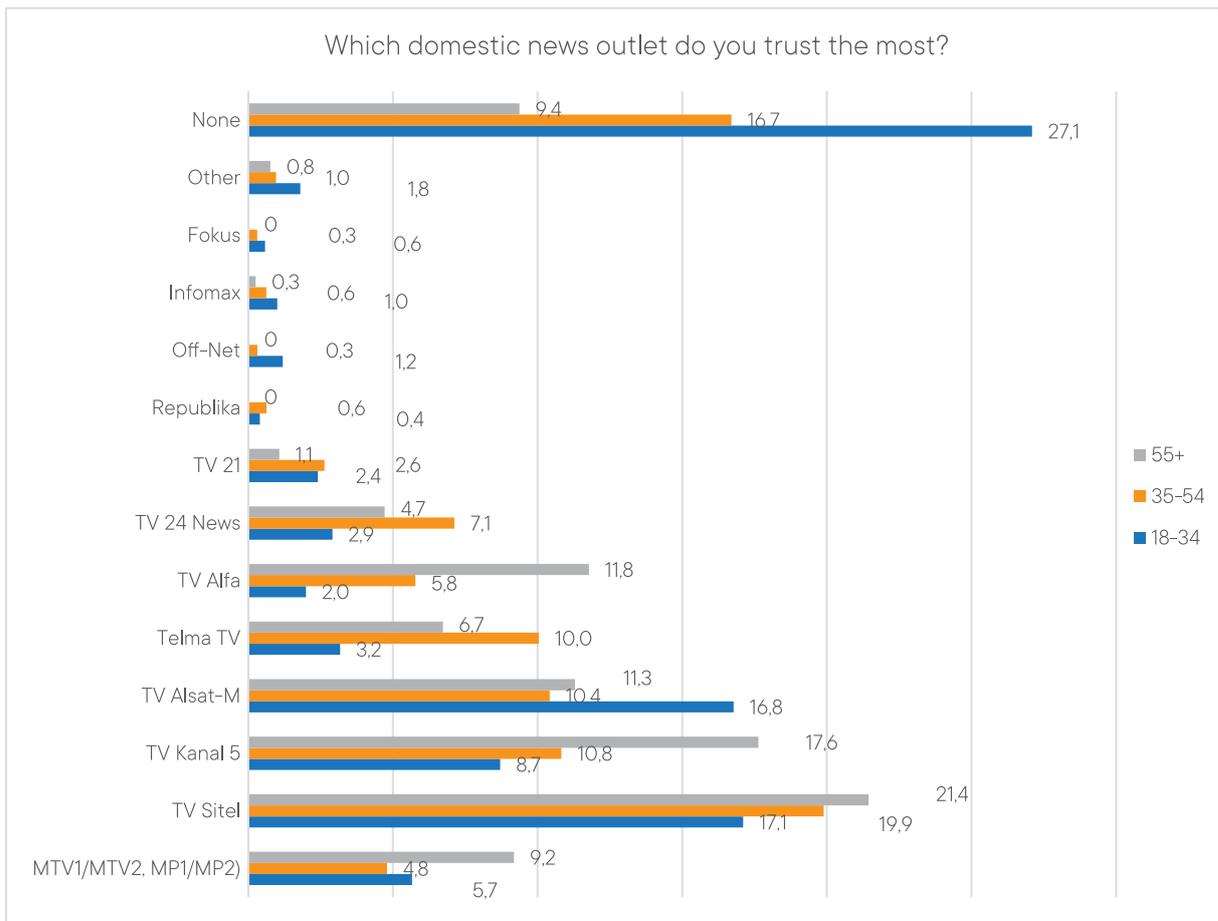


Figure 111: Consumption from domestic media, by age group

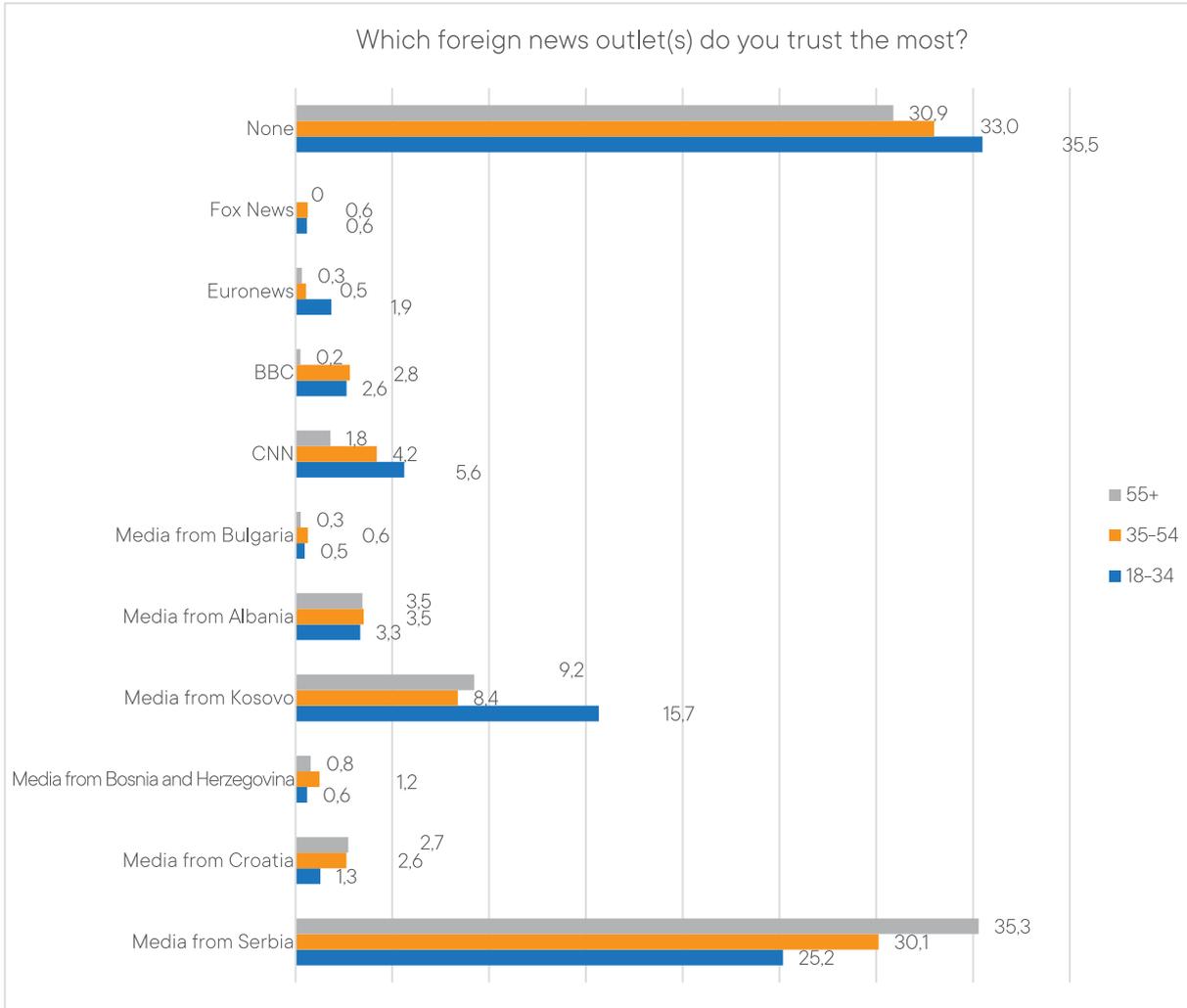


Figure 112: Consumption from foreign media, by age groups

Section 19: Ethnicity – Media Consumption

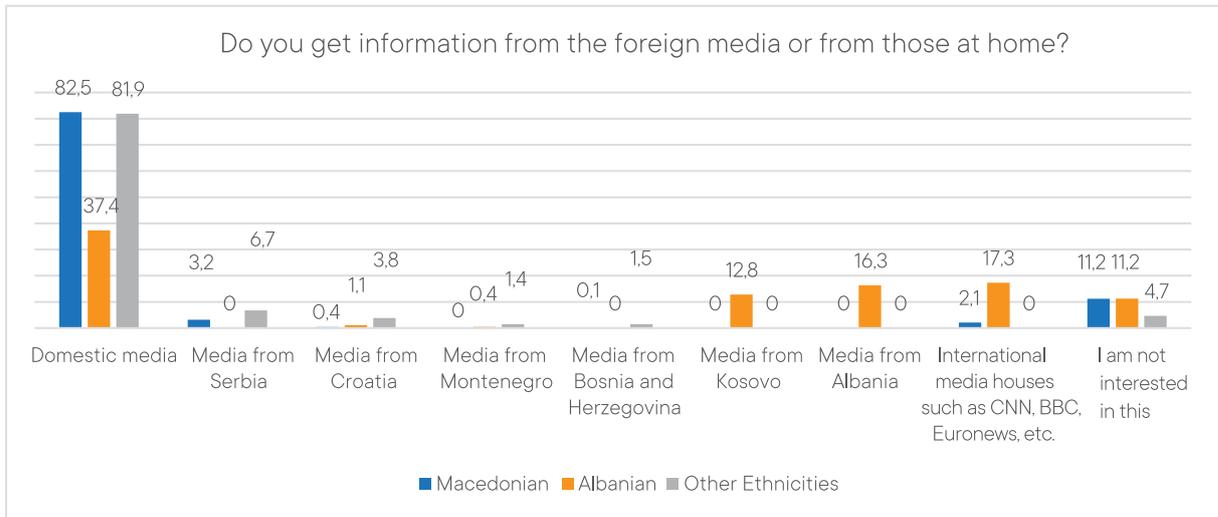


Figure 113: Source of information, by ethnicity

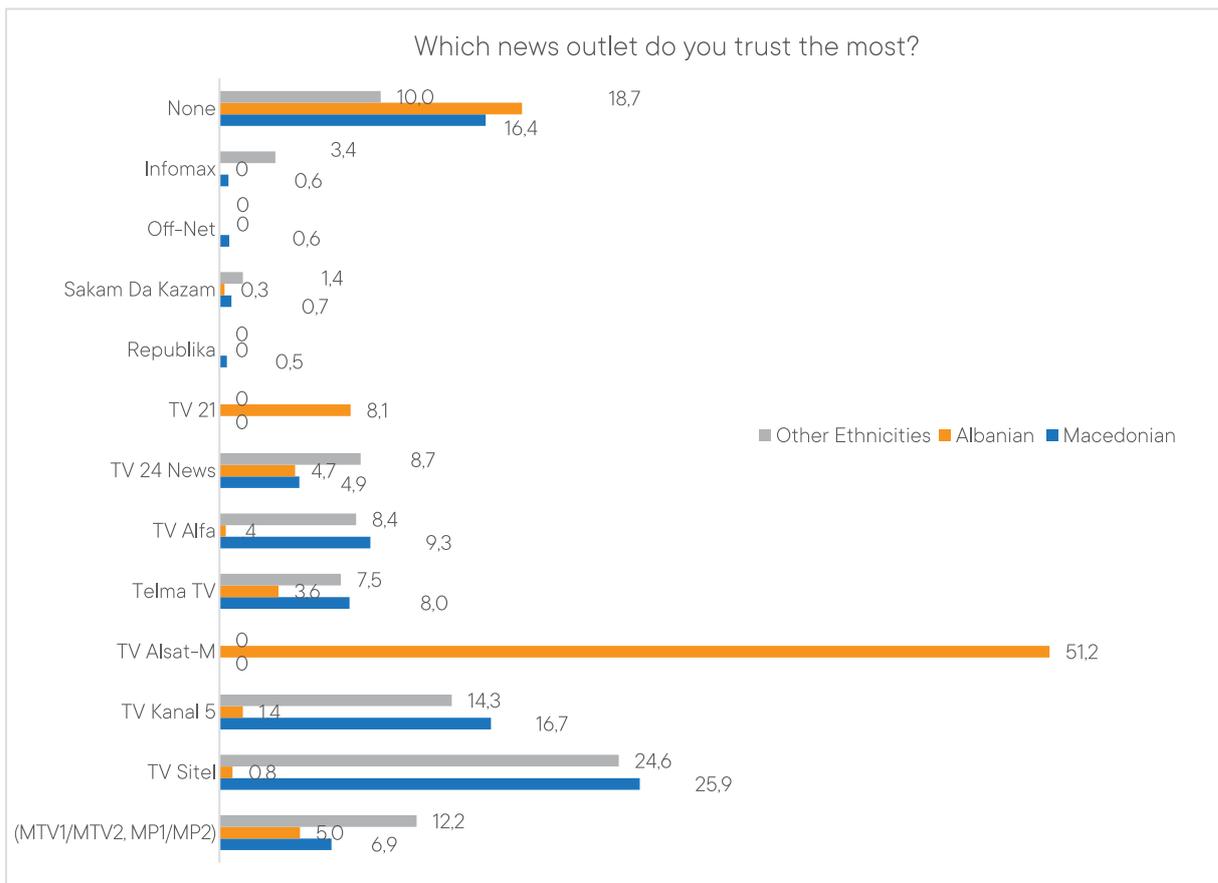


Figure 114: Trust in domestic media, by ethnicity

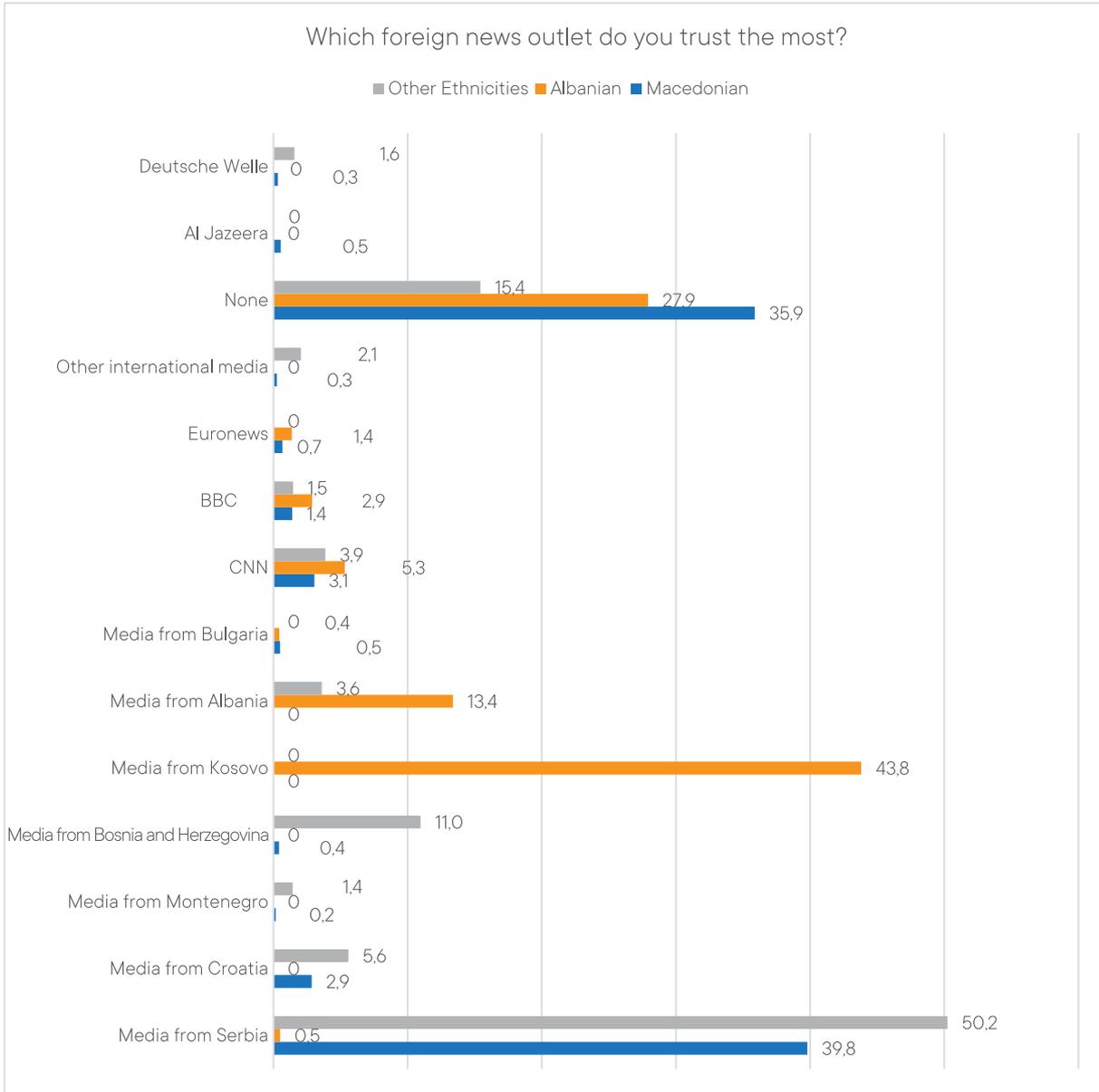


Figure 115: Trust in regional and international media, by ethnicity

Section 20: Political Party Preference – Media Consumption

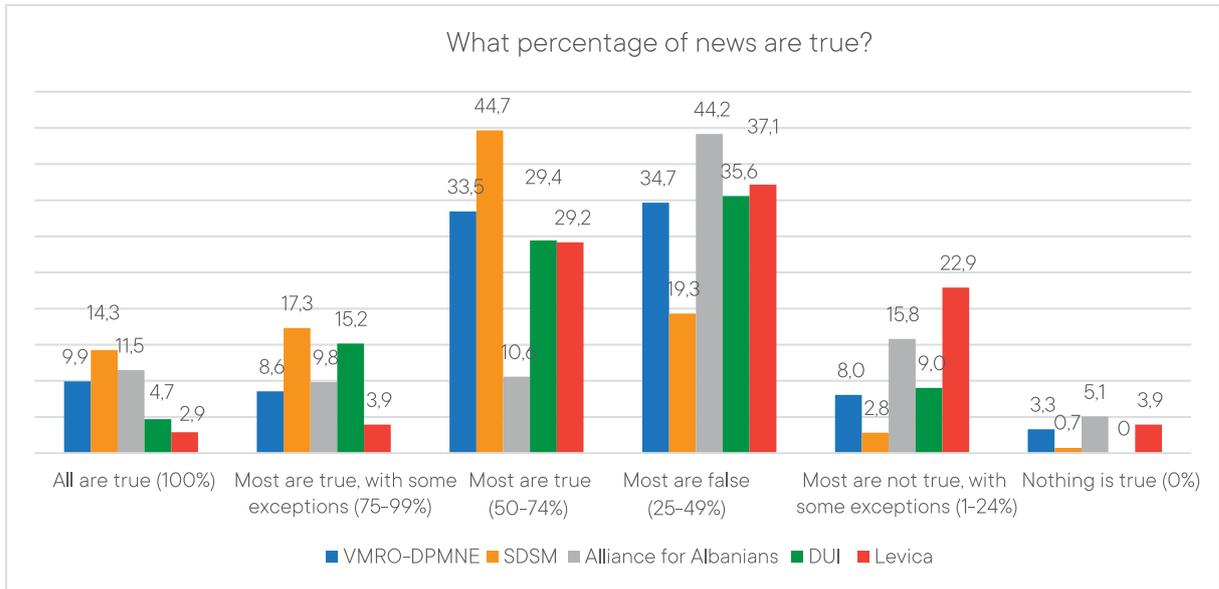


Figure 116: Percentage of news that are truthful, by Political Party Preference

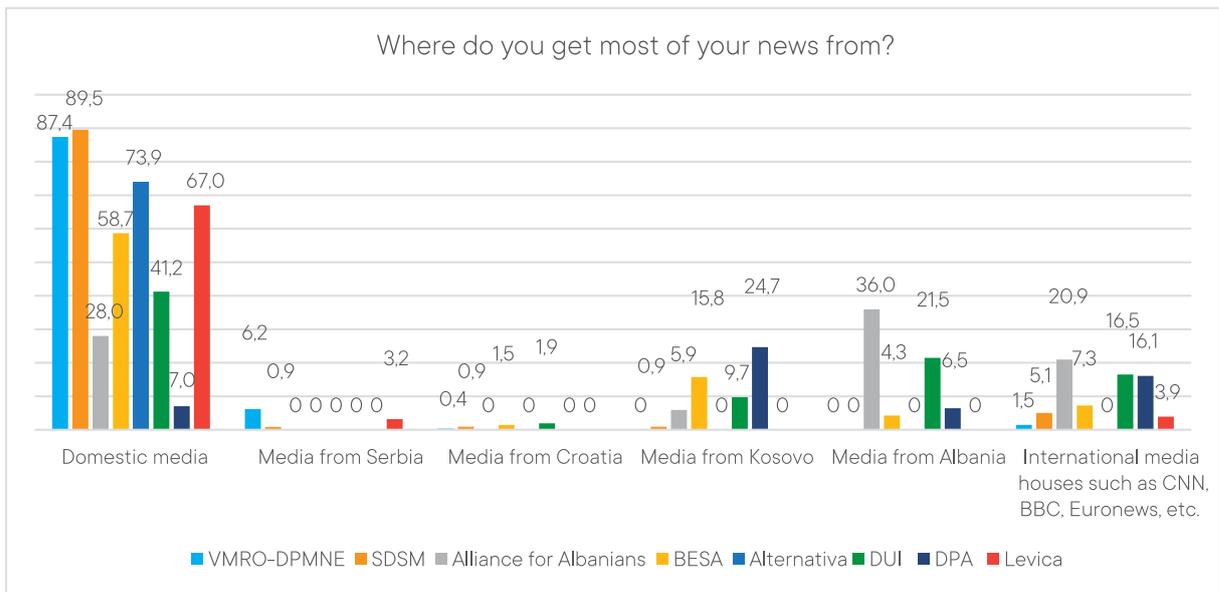


Figure 117: Source of information (domestic/foreign), by Political Party Preference

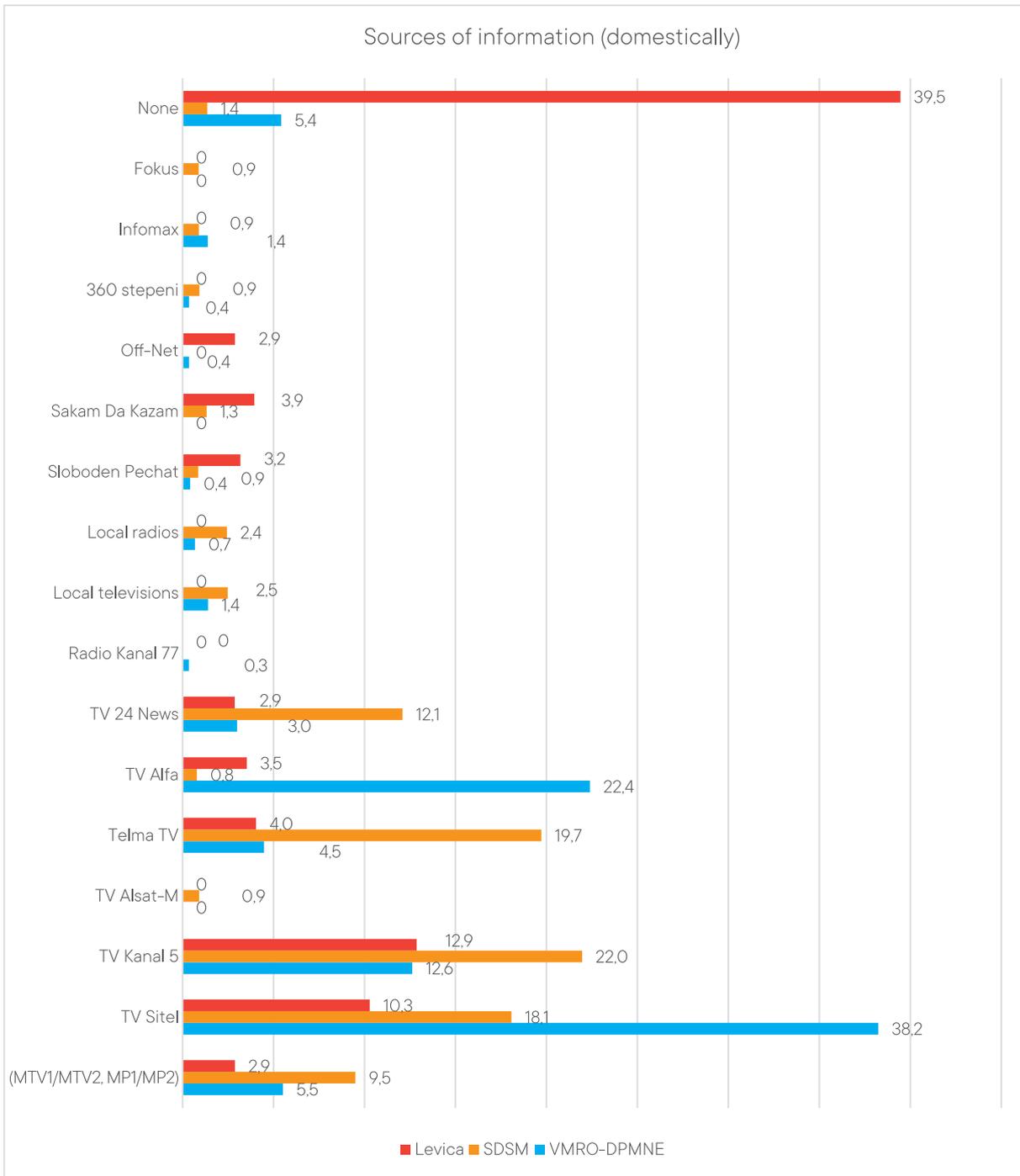


Figure 118: Domestic sources of information, by Political Party Preference

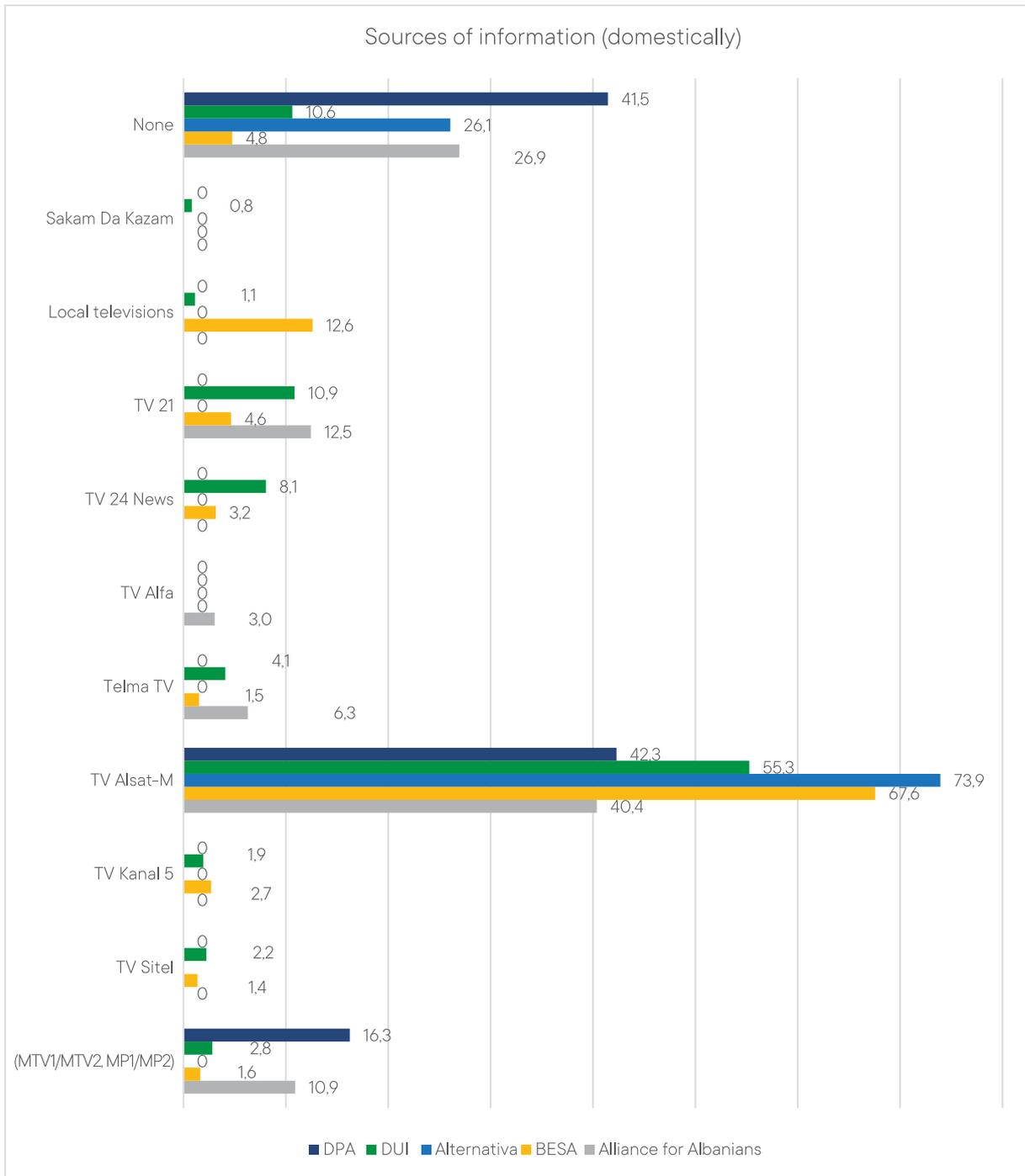


Figure 119: Domestic sources of information, by Political Party Preference

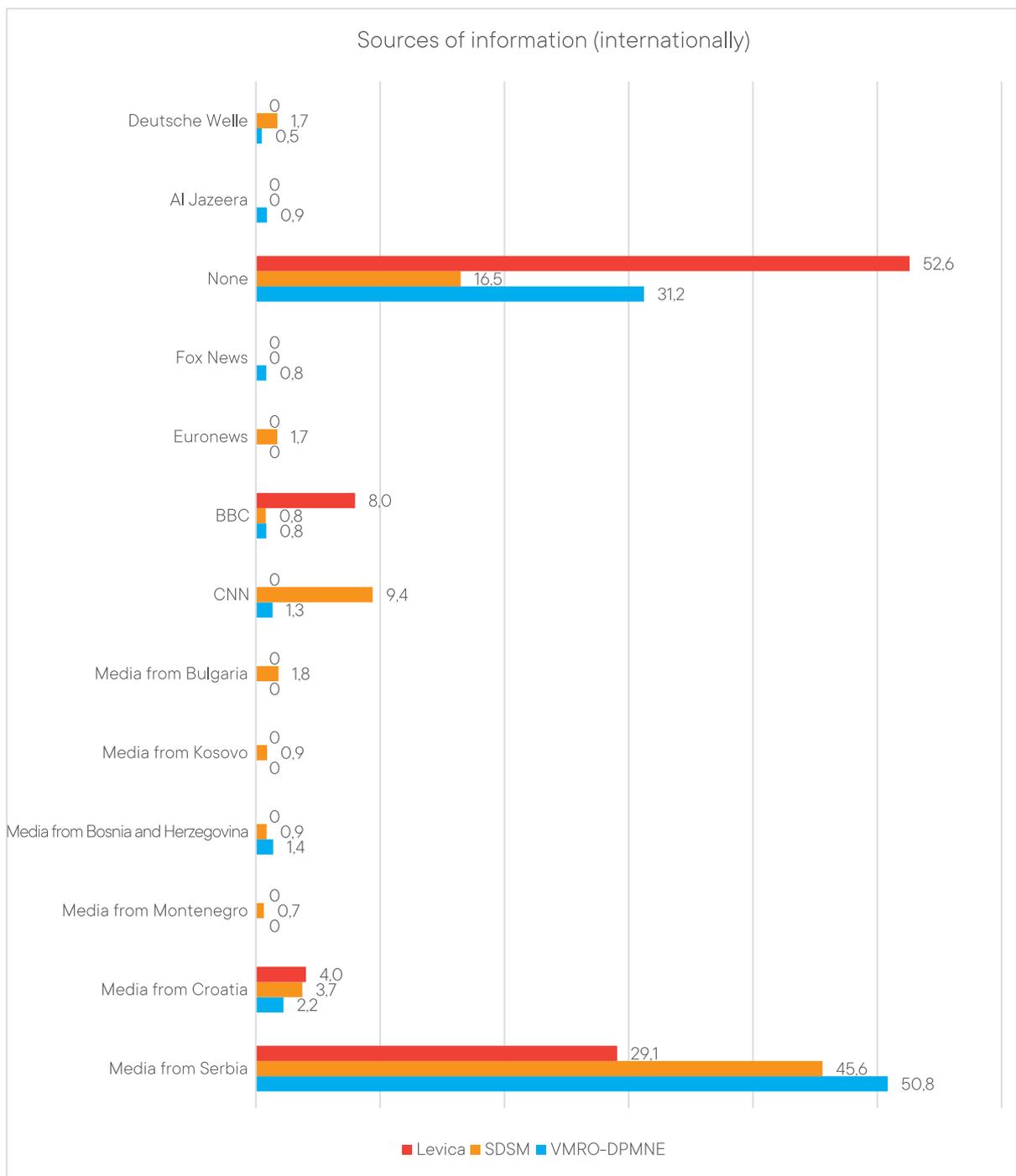


Figure 120: International sources of information, by Political Party Preference

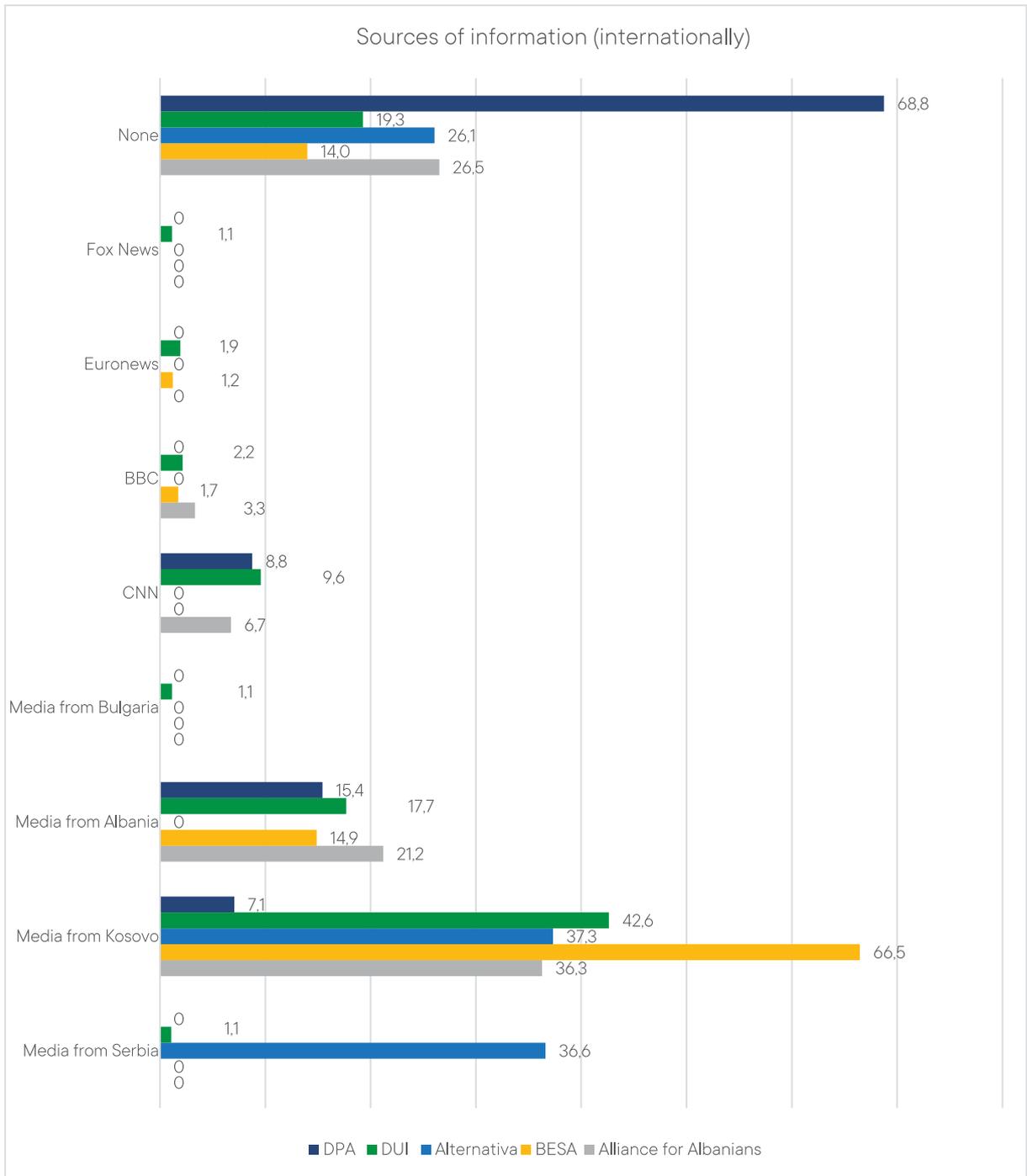


Figure 121: International sources of information, by Political Party Preference

